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A COMPARATIVE ESTIMATE
OF
MODERN ENGLISH POETS.



A Comparative Estimate

OF

Modern English Poets.

BY

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COMPARATIVE ESTIMATE OF MODERN ENGLISH POETS.

CHAPTER I.

UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE IN ART.

HAZLITT says that the principle of universal suffrage is all very well in matters of political government, which affect the common interests of society, but is not in the least applicable to matters of taste, which can only be decided by the most refined understandings.* But, in the affairs of Parnassus, the judgments of the refined will often be found indisputably wrong, and those of the commonalty as indisputably right. Quintilian thought that the "Argonautics" of Apollonius was a performance of a very high order of merit; but the great mass of his countrymen invariably deemed it, what it unquestionably is, a performance of a very low order of merit. It cannot be denied that Queen Caroline was a lady of strong intellectual predilections; at least so say Clarke and Leibnitz; yet Stephen Duck was her favourite poet. Akenside and Warton were, probably, the most refined writers of their age. Yet Akenside thought so highly of Dyer's long since forgotten "Fleece," as to accept the light in which it was regarded by the public, as a test of the poetical qualities of the age. The lofty opinion which Warton had of the miserable

Elegiacs of Hammond, was hardly surpassed by his admiration of Gray. It is only the other day a wretched rhymester of Westmoreland was recommended by some of the foremost occupants of the episcopal bench, and two or three noble lords of acknowledged literary taste, to the crown, for a pension, as possessing merit on a level with Burns. We also know that a beardless youth, at the end of last century, succeeded in palming off on the élite of London fashionable society, his stupid "Vortigern," for a genuine play of Shakespeare, until the representation of the piece, when both pit and gallery laughed it out of Covent Garden. Yet, Pye, the laureate of those days, wrote the prologue to the play, and Parr and Boswell, with a host of other literary celebrities, were vouchers for its authenticity. A few years earlier than this freak of young Ireland's, there died in the same year two Scotch poets, whose fame, while living, is now generally admitted to have been in inverse proportion to their merits. One was carried by torch-light, beneath nodding plumes, in solemn state, to Westminster Abbey. The other was laid, by an awkward squad of brother yeomen, beneath a mound of turf in the quiet churchyard of Dumfries. To name Macpherson now as possessing gifts at all akin with the national minstrel of Scotland, would be deemed a sorry exhibition of taste. Yet there cannot be a doubt that, a century ago, Burns was comparatively obscure, while his more fortunate rival blazed in the poetical firmament, as a star of the first magnitude. We are not at all sure that, in the sphere of poetry, had universal suffrage been adopted at the close of last century, it would not have led us to truer results, than a suffrage based upon the possession of a certain quantum of refined judgment in the upper classes of society. For, while Macpherson was fêted as a literary genius by the first circles in London, Burns was allowed to pass his best years as a mere gauger of whiskey barrels, in an obscure corner of a Scotch province.

So far, then, as the reputation of a poet is concerned, we

should be even more inclined to rest our judgment on the independent opinion of the commonalty, than upon that of any distinct section of the upper ten thousand, no matter however refined that section may be. For, poetry is an art connected with the delineation of human passions and feelings; and of the truth of that delineation, the greater the number of judges, the more likely are we to arrive at a correct result. Molière is said to have read over his plays to his maid-servant, and always found that her judgment anticipated the degree of success awarded by the public. And we do not doubt he was right.

Painting requires an educated eye, music a disciplined ear; but poetry, diving to the bottom of the heart, which each one carries about with him, represents its sorrows and its joys, its hopes and fears. The circle of judges may therefore be proportionally enlarged, till it becomes commensurate with all who are in any way masters of the language in which the representation is conveyed. Those who possess a knowledge of the poet's words, are like the holders of a galvanic wire down which the stream of his thoughts flow, affecting each alike with the impression of his burning images, at least so far as the recipients of the poetic battery are possessed of a common organization.

“One touch of nature makes the whole world kin;”

and the soundest, if not the only practical test, we can have of the genuineness of the touch, is the beating of the general bosom in common sympathy with it. But the opinion of the commonalty, to be of any worth, ought to be exercised upon matters which appeal to the general feelings, and under certain conditions which place its judgments beyond the reach of fashionable coteries or temporary prejudices. It is not so much the nature of the tribunal we would object to,—if the free and unbiassed exercise of its judgment could be obtained,—as its liability to being warped by foreign influence. In some matters, as in the higher walks of satire, its opinions do not seem of much

weight. There are far more copies, now, in circulation of the "Minstrel," than of "Roscius." Yet, who would take Beattie for a greater poet than Churchill,—the one hardly deserving of the name, and the other the author of the most nervous lines in our language. But Churchill shot his arrows at particular characters of his age, now well-nigh forgotten; and the private recklessness of the man, together with the ephemeral subjects of his muse, has eclipsed his poetical genius in the eyes of a generation which regards moral dignity as one of the first constituents of divine poetry. Even upon subjects with which it is competent to deal, the opinion of the commonalty is frequently not an independent opinion, but one adopted on trust at the dictation of literary cliques, or of persons of refined, but conventional, sympathies. For the public, occasionally, with respect to this branch of art, is in an idle mood, and luxuriously reposes upon the judgments manufactured for it by others. Sometimes, the unformed and growing state of a language, at others a perverted taste, will warp its judgment, and invest, as with a haze, the exercise of its critical faculties. At the rise of Greek letters, smooth writing was more esteemed than sublimity, and Simonides carried off the prize from Æschylus; just as, at the origin of Latin comedy, Ennius was much more in repute than Terence or Plautus. But a more refined age reversed these crude decisions. The age of the Restoration was so blinded by political fanaticism and by French levity, as to prefer Sedley to Milton, and the plays of Shadwell to those of Shakespeare. It is, thus, that our ancient temples have occasionally to submit to the indignities of having the most salient beauties of their architecture buried beneath coats of lime-plaster. A generation rises up who sees more ornament in a flat surface of white chalk than in a groined arch, or in a bullioned window, or rich architrave, and who proceed to realize their barbarities, by consigning these triumphs to temporary oblivion. If, therefore, we are to rely upon universal suffrage as a guide to a correct discernment of the poetical

faculty, in matters falling within its competency, then, to make the test of real value, it must be one based upon the concurrent testimony of two or more ages, in order to eliminate the causes which occasionally interfere with its exercise upon independent and unfactitious grounds. For the past is crowded with bubble reputations, which once filled Europe with their fame. Who would think of citing Davenant and Blackmore, now, as poets, except in the lowest meaning of the term? Yet in the eyes of their contemporaries, their place was as high as any on the steeps of Parnassus. What poet in his day filled a larger portion of the public eye than Ronsard, or a less portion than Milton? Yet their generations had no sooner past away, than the renowned was consigned to oblivion, and the obscure was lifted up to greatness. It would, therefore, be a high degree of rashness, to conclude from the present, the future reputation of a poet. His contemporary fame is an earnest of enduring greatness, only so far as his works may be conformable to the canons of sound criticism. If they will not stand this test, his triumph, depending on the breath of a fleeting multitude, must collapse, when that multitude shall have passed away.

CHAPTER II.

PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS.

WHAT are the elements of poetry? Are there any marks or tests by which the higher, may be distinguished from its lower forms, endorsed by the judgment of the past, and likely to meet with so general an acceptance, as to anticipate with reference to contemporary poets, the judgment of the future? Aristotle tried his hand at elaborating canons of poetical criticism, over twenty-two hundred years ago; but, owing to his fondness for abstract theories, and the narrow area to which his views were necessarily confined, his judgments would not be of much help to us now. How far poetry is an imitative art; what are the different species into which it may be divided; what construction of plot is most calculated to produce excellence; what are the functions of the Greek chorus, or the nature of the unities of time and place,—these are all that the master of Greek criticism touches in a theoretical manner, without the slightest psychological analysis, or any objective basis, beyond the literature of his own country. We stand, however, in this respect, in a superior position to Aristotle, having a better method, and a far more enlarged field to furnish a basis for our enquiries, as well as to test the accuracy of any theories which we may form upon the subject. These advantages enable us to go farther than Aristotle, who merely summarized the principles upon which the great poets of Greece acted, as a guide to a

correct judgment of the past ; whereas, we would summarize the more enlarged principles which our national poets have exemplified, as a guide to the judgment of the future. From the standard by which the poetry of the past has been estimated, we would fashion our opinions as to that of the present, in order to foreshadow as in a mirror the judgment of posterity.

Here, however, we encounter on the threshold of the subject a difficulty ; that is the variable nature of the organization of each individual to whom we appeal. We can readily agree in making out what constitutes the elements of poetry. But, discord is too apt to arise, when we assign to this writer such a depth of pathos, and to another such an amount of imagination, or sublimity, simply because we have no accurate weights or measures universally recognised, by which the intensity of such spiritual qualities can be tested, as readily as the quantities of material things. Brown, for instance, has a highly sympathetic nature, which only awaits a spark to explode. Jones's nature, on the contrary, is hard as iron, and could not be melted without being cast into a furnace. The poet, who appears to Brown profoundly pathetic, will strike Jones as being entirely wanting in that element. It is this variable organization which colours most of the criticism of the day, and makes art judgments so divergent and so conflicting. One critic is lymphatic ; he, therefore, deals very severely with a writer of a highly imaginative character. Another has a very sanguine temperament ; he, consequently, has no patience with a poet of the philosophic class. It is the same with nations as with individuals. The French have a very imperfect conception of the sublime ; and, therefore, Milton and Shakespeare have never been appreciated by them, to anything like the full extent of their genius. The Germans have a very inadequate notion of the facetious ; and, therefore, the reputations of Hood, Swift, and Butler to them are so many enigmas. The Italians, likewise, lack the spirit of profound introspective analysis, and, therefore, such writers as Wordsworth and Coleridge are still at a

discount on the other side of the Alps. It does not, however, follow, on account of these varying standards, that we are unable to test or gauge the qualities entering into the composition of any individual writer, at least within some definite limits of accuracy, any more than we should be unable to measure the dimensions or distances of the stars, on account of the variable haziness of the atmosphere through which they are viewed. We, in England, springing from a mixture of foreign peoples, are, perhaps, more fitted to wield the critical sceptre than any of our neighbours, who are much less composite in their origin. But, as the results of criticism, under the most favourable conditions, cannot be measured by any yard line, or counted upon our ten fingers, they must fail to coerce the irrational, the phlegmatic, and the dull ; and, therefore, at best can only be expected to meet with general, and not universal, recognition.

The question, as to what constitutes poetry, has been answered in various ways according to the notion uppermost in the writer's mind, rather than with a view to embrace the subject within the limits of a logical definition. Shelley has described poetry, as the language of the imagination, which is only one, though the chief element in it. Byron calls poetry, the feeling of past worlds and future, which is a description of the subject matter about which poetry is mainly, but by no means exhaustively, employed. Aristotle evidently thought he had fathomed the subject, when he told his readers, poetry was an imitative art, and that the things imitated were the passions and the manners of men. But this only reveals one of the modes by which the art manifests itself. Keats has more graphically represented poetry under the figure of a vessel, with invention for its pole star, imagination for the sails, and wit for its rudder. But imagination and invention in poetry are frequently only two ways of looking at the same thing. The metaphor, therefore, will not bear analysis. Coleridge, perhaps, has more accurately expressed himself, when he describes good sense as the body of poetry, fancy its drapery, motion its life,

and imagination its soul. We need, however, a complete and exhaustive definition of the elements of poetry, and not a loose enumeration of the faculties employed in their manipulation. Such Leigh Hunt has attempted, in defining poetry as the utterance of a passion for truth, beauty, and power, embodying and illustrating its conceptions by imagination and fancy, and modulating its language on the principle of variety in uniformity. But this definition would exclude pure thought, and that wide circle of subjects in which feeling is made tributary to it, without manifesting that overmastering energy which imaginative passion would imply. A large portion of, what may be called, pure, descriptive, contemplative, and didactic poetry, would, if Leigh Hunt's definition were accepted, have to be separated from its domain. It is evident that these and other such attempts to enclose within fixed boundaries, all the peculiar region of poetry, only present us with fragments of the subject, which are often, indeed, insisted upon with the sectarian spirit of excluding those, from the roll of poets, against whom the framers of such definitions have any antipathy.

This thrusting the idle figments of the fancy too prominently forward, as the grand discriminating criterion of poetry, has been a source of great mischief, in deterring a matter-of-fact age from cultivating a deep acquaintance with a subject so powerfully capable of neutralizing its prosaic tendencies. Society is too much considered, in the present age, under its economic aspects. Men are considered as almost exclusively influenced by motives of gain. All æsthetic feeling, as a motive power, is banished from the world of action, and pinioned to the sphere of sentiment. Hence poetry, as the expression or embodiment of our perception of beauty, is considered as the mere pastime of our leisure hours, leaving no further mark on the world's course, than the last game of billiards, or the next game of croquet. Whereas, what is the fact? The ancient nations fought with desperate energy, for ten years, on account of a beautiful woman, and even in these economic times, two of

the most advanced races in Europe, have disorganized their social structure, and rushed to exterminate each other, on account of a beautiful river. The Celt and the Teuton, indeed, have been fighting, at intermittent intervals, for the Rhine, during the last 300 years. The crusades, which flung Europe at the throat of Asia, and which have given more colour to modern history than any other event, arose out of feelings connected with man's yearnings for the infinite, and those spiritual aspirations which constitute the essence of poetry. The influence of popular songs upon the multitude is known to all. The "Lillibullero" was one of the chief agents in effecting the collapse of the Stuart dynasty, and the *Marseillaise*, more powerfully than any other cause, contributed to the victories which the armies of the French Republic gained over those of foreign despots. The hymns of the early Christian Church, or those sung by the Albigenses in their mountain fastnesses, acted like a talisman in perpetuating modes of belief destined to fling society upon fresh paths.

It appears, therefore, so far from the subject of poetry being the mere ebullition of man's transient feelings, or its expression falling like a snow-flake upon the stream of events, no subjects lie so permanently about man's heart, or are more intimately connected with his most serious affairs, or have so definitely moulded the course of history, as those which ordinarily find their useful embodiment in song. But the most favourable idea now entertained of poetry is, that it is a sort of phantom world, a mere region of spectral illusion with which truth has very little to do, beyond engrafting living passion on mimic heroes, and making fictitious characters assume the appearance of reality. This, certainly, embraces a large slice of the poetic territory, but by no means the heart of it. For, the description of actual, falls as much within the function of the poet, as imaginary, suffering. We are liable indeed to be more excited by the narration of real, than simulated, passion. Burns' "Highland Mary" comes much nearer to our feelings than the "Angelica" of Ariosto, and we

are moved more by the every-day realities in Crabbe, than by any of the enchantments in Spenser. It is the province of poetry, to carry us out of ourselves, to make us forget our own petty concerns and selfish views in the sympathy created by the joys and griefs of others ; to make our hearts beat in unison with the general interests of humanity ; and whether the means, by which these results are achieved, have a real or fictitious basis, it amounts pretty much to the same thing as far as the scope of the art is concerned.

Hence, it appears, that powers of observation and keen analysis of life and character play a distinguished part in poetic composition, and that they may occasionally supply the place of imagination, where they are not, as in fictitious narrative, subsidiary to it. Chaucer is generally a favourite poet, with those who accept the purely imaginative element, as the distinguishing feature in poetry. But even in the tales of Chaucer, there are pictures drawn from contemporary life and manners, with which the imaginative element had nothing whatever to do. These pictures entirely arose out of the emotions which certain visual facts excited in his mind. In the above category may be set down the poems of Crabbe, the satires of Dryden and Juvenal, the moral essays and epistles of Pope and Horace. Here, we have external character graphically delineated, social phenomena faithfully reproduced, and both relieved by lively sallies of wit or the softer emotions of pity. Even in the great creative poets, where the imaginative element rules supreme, the inferential and constructive faculties, with philosophic insight into human events, play a most distinguished rôle, in the evolution of poetic thought ; for not only have fabulous personages to be vitalized by human passion, but fictitious narratives have to be constructed, with that logical sequence which always sees the effect in the cause, and reads in a knot of composite phenomena, a few abiding laws and plastic ideas. Unity has to be impressed upon a mass of heterogeneous materials. Divergent parts have to be centralized, and artistic

design made to wear all the appearance of nature. It is evident, therefore, though a philosopher need not be a poet, that a great poet must be a philosopher.

As Leigh Hunt defined poetry to be passionate imagination, Ebenezer Elliot, himself a poet of no inconsiderable powers, characterized it as impassioned truth. To this view, John Stuart Mill has more or less subscribed, by denominating poetry, as, the mere influence of the feelings over our thoughts in solitude, and the embodiment of the ideas resulting therefrom, in metrical language. But I would guard as much against making all poetry the mere temporary ebullition of the feelings, as the simple product of the imaginative element. Ebenezer Elliot's definition, though good as far as it goes, is, like all those which have preceded it, only fragmentary. For, all truth which awakes within us the feeling of the infinite, whether impassioned or not, I hold to be poetry. Hence, all recondite laws which reveal the foundation of our being, or excite a vivid sensation of the past, or a palpable foreshadowing of the future, constitute poetry, in the loftiest sense. What the doctrine of destiny was to the Greek, the abiding permanence of law, as revealed in all social and natural phenomena, is to us. In this light, poetry may be considered as philosophy made sensible. In following Hamlet into the churchyard, we derive an important lesson as to the indestructibility of matter. "Why may not imagination follow the noble dust of Alexander till we find it stopping up a bung-hole?" When Spenser calls the lily the plant and flower of light, he points to the fact, that there is no substance in the lily to decompose light, and, therefore, it is clad in pure whiteness. In like manner, when Byron tells us, that the mind in love is fevered into false creation, and that neither worth nor beauty exist outside the mind's ideal shape of such,* the poet reveals a psychological truth which might form the basis of a metaphysical theory. When he, also, identifies man's first consummation of love with his fall,† he supplies a her-

* "*Childe Harold*," c. iv., s. 122, 123. † "*Don Juan*," c. i., v. 127.

meneutical key to the First Book of Genesis, which the Jews themselves have long admitted the sense of. So when Ten-nyson, in allusion to the religious aspect of humanity, says,

Our petty systems have their day,
 They have their day and cease to be,
 They are but broken lights of Thee,
 And Thou, O ! Lord, art more than they.*—

to what else can the poet refer but the fact, real or assumed, that the character of men's creeds depends upon their state of knowledge, and that, as their scientific basis shifts, the mode in which they worship the Deity, must vary, according to the insight into His nature which they gain from His works? Again, when Byron speaks of our nature being bound with an electric chain, which, as it is stricken by any casual object, presses past recollections upon us,†, he lays bare a fundamental law in connection with the association of ideas. In most of these cases, the exercise of the imagination is common both to the poet and philosopher. But, the man of science subjects the suggestions of that faculty to rigid numerical tests or to the ordeal of experiment, while the poet leaves them in their shadowy state to throw a veil of spirituality over the material world. The one employs the imagination to connect facts with abiding laws, to reveal, by means of general axioms, the mechanism of the universe. The other uses the imagination to reveal the sources of the mechanism itself, and its connection with the infinite. The one seeks to explain certain classes of phenomena by definite principles, the other mounts to the causes in which both principles and phenomena have their origin. Hence, it not unfrequently happens that poets, while contemplating the marvels of the universe, hit upon truths which anticipate scientific discoveries, and sometimes, indeed, serve as the basis of scientific progress. The law of gravitation has been found in Dante. Shakespeare revealed the circulation of the blood,

* "In Memoriam." Prelude.

† "Childe Harold," c. iv., s. 23.

before it was propounded by Harvey.* Goethe, while contemplating plants, hit upon the important law regulating their growth, which has revolutionized botany. It came into the mind of the same poet, stumbling over some bones in a churchyard, that the spinal sheath was only a prolongation of the development of the skull, an idea of which Owen has made so much in his work on the vertebræ of animals. We all know that the poet Haüy, while pondering over the beauty of the inorganic world, discovered the great law of the isomorphism of minerals, solving that problem by an effort of the imagination, which had baffled the efforts of a crowd of inductive philosophers. It is, indeed, a function which the poet enjoys in common with the philosopher, to conduct the soul into the interior *adyta* of the universe, to reveal hidden laws, and to bring to light the host of analogies which exist between the spiritual and material order of things. So far, then, is poetry from being opposed to science and philosophy, that it may be regarded as the helpmate to both. It deals primarily with truth, and only with fiction as subsidiary thereto. When the poet wishes to show the play of peculiar passions, under peculiar circumstances, he has recourse to fabulous narrative. But truth is, nevertheless, his object, though it may be derivative. Where the circumstances are not feigned, but real, the truth he aims at is direct. But whether derivative or direct, the poet fulfils his loftiest mission, when the truths which he sets forth assume the dignity of abiding laws, revealing the foundations of man's nature, or laying bare those great principles which blend the mind with the harmonies of the external world, and control his destinies under conflicting civilizations. If these truths are oftener intertwined with fable than otherwise, it is to make them more universal or general, to interest the human heart in their evolution, and enable the poet to display them with more unshackled facility.

* "Coriolanus," Act i., sc. 1,—Speech of Menenius Agrippa.

Truth, then, I would make equally the aim of the poet and the philosopher. But with the man of science, it is truth unconnected with the feelings, truth reduced into system, rising from the ground of numerical tests and of inductive experiment; whereas, the poet deals with truth in its deductive range, arising out of his imaginative instincts and connected with his emotional nature. But, while admitting poetic truth to be always suffused with feeling, I would not go as far as Mr. Mill in saying that feeling ought to be the leading element in it.* Just as I would guard the domain of poetry from being unduly monopolized by fiction, so I would guard it from being the arena of vague sentimentality. The loftiest poetry must be tinged with feeling, but never entirely dominated by it. Thought, not mere emotion, must be the guiding principle in it. But Mr. Mill inverts this position. He will have it, that the highest poetry is the mere ebullition of feeling, and that where thought comes in to assume the guiding rein, we realize the distinction between poets of culture, as distinguished from those of nature. He, even, cites Wordsworth, confessedly one of the first poets of this country, as one who allowed thought to guide his feelings, and, therefore, as one who could not derive his poetic lineage from nature. But on this subject, the popular judgment appears sounder than that of the philosopher. For, those are generally esteemed poets of culture who produce nothing strikingly original themselves, but allow the thoughts and phraseology of other writers to dominate their ideas and expressions; while genuine poets, or, in other words, those not made but born such, derive their heritage from nature, quite independent of the influence of others. They are those who enrich the world with new thoughts, and who only employ feeling to stamp their ideas with that earnestness which blend them with the human heart for ever. The rational and emotional nature have each their proper functions, the one as the guiding, and the other, as the motive, power; but if the propelling is to

* "Poetry and its Varieties: Essays and Dissertations."

usurp the place of the ruling, force, a feminine element is introduced, destructive alike of that lofty conception, of that symmetry of design, of that grandeur of purpose, which we seek in first-class poetry. The elements of poetry are so many, that to embrace them in one concise definition, in such order as to give to each its relative value and significance, is a difficult task, and one in which I shall, doubtless, be considered to fare little better than my predecessors. But though the definition can only be deemed of a tentative nature, I must not here evade the opportunity of attempting it. In accordance, therefore, with the views already expressed, poetry may be said to be an art both imitative and inventive, of which truth is the object, whereby is expressed in metrical language, man's conception of the relation between the actual and the ideal, the concrete and the infinite. Here, we have the form of poetry, the two invariable modes by which it manifests itself, and the subject-matter about which it is employed. Imagination and fancy enter more largely into it than any other powers, without, however, excluding reason, both intuitive and discursive, which, in combination with feeling, occasionally gives birth to lofty poetry, and which invariably forms the chart by which the poet unifies his complex design, and steers his imagination into the haven of truth and reality.

The powers of the mind are all employed in poetry, but in different degrees, and its subject-matter is the present universe and all possible worlds beyond. This illimitable region is contained in the relations between the ideal and the actual. For, in the ideal, we can never lose sight of the actual, but must shape our conceptions in conformity with its types, as the only means of impressing them as active agents upon others ; just as in the actual, we must never lose sight of the ideal ; otherwise, we get upon mere matters of fact devoid of genuine truth, and, therefore, containing no poetry whatever. The actual and the ideal refer to pictures of life or historic truth ; the concrete and

the infinite, to philosophic truth, or those revealing the main-springs of our being, the nature of the soul, and its connection with the universe. With the actual and the concrete in themselves, emotion may only be occasionally blended, but their relation to the infinite and ideal is the source of that world of feeling which lofty intellectual effort evokes, and which is connected with our joys and our hopes, our aspirations and our sorrows.

Poetry is commonly divided into five primary species, viz., the epic, dramatic, lyric, didactic, and satiric. In these are included seven derivative forms. The didactic may be viewed as containing the descriptive, the satiric, the poetry of wit and humour. The lyric embraces the elegy, the ode, and the ballad. The epos branches out into the two kinds of narrative poetry, the one complex, or representative, which is a sort of bastard epic, the other simple, as the common or bucolic idyl. The epos and the drama are at the top of the scale, and descriptive poetry, and that of mere wit and humour, at the bottom. These two ends are connected in due gradation by the representative poem, which ranks next after the drama, followed by the two higher forms of the lyric; then come the didactic and satiric, which are succeeded by the simple narrative poem, the ballad, and the bucolic idyl. I do not know that this order of rank differs materially from any other previously given, unless we adopt Mr. Mill's theory, which makes the lyric and the elegiac the highest species of poetry, as these are supposed to embody more feeling than any other, and places the epic and dramatic at the top of the tree, because they include the lyric and the elegiac as well as all the rest. But as the three greatest epic poems extant comprise no instance of either lyric or elegiac poetry, this view is clearly unmaintainable. We are, therefore, obliged to adopt the order already assigned, by the desirability of preserving a due gradation between the different species of poetry, not according to the test of so unstable a thing as feeling, but according to the degrees of mental strength which each requires for its successful cultivation.

There is this much in the Greek conception of poetry, viz., as something made after the fashion of nature, that it reveals to us the two pivots upon which all genuine poetry turns. Without invention or imitation, no real poetry can be said to exist ; but invention may be exercised beyond the confines of the actual, as well as within it. Invention purely ideal is invention of the loftiest kind. But within the domain of the actual, it may be taken in the higher sense of the invention of great plots or characters, or in the lower, of the devising incidents by which sudden turns or agreeable surprises are prepared to keep alive the attention of the reader. The two higher kinds constitute the soul of epic and dramatic, the last of ballad, elegiac, and lyric poetry. The epos and the drama, however, embrace the lower forms of invention, but the ballad, the elegy, and the ode never comprise the higher. The superiority, therefore, of the epos and drama to the other species of poetry may be said to rest on the greater powers of mind involved in their delineation.

Imitation is another element of distinction between the same and different species of poetry, a proper consideration of which will help us to fix the rank of each on a psychological basis. Imitation, like invention, has its higher and lower forms ; but only in the latter of these is it taken in its direct and obvious sense. Shakespeare, when he describes a storm, skilfully paints the effects of certain natural phenomena ; but when he introduces us to aërials and to witches, we get types of character beyond the region of nature, which have, however, to be developed according to a certain standard of truthfulness which nature has stamped on our imagination. This is creative imitation. When the characters do not conform to the natural type, the imitation is defective. When they answer all its requirements, the poet succeeds in accomplishing the highest feat of his art—that is, in imitating, while he sublimates, nature into higher forms than are to be met with in actual life. For this is in some respects like enlarging the bounds and multiplying the objects of creation,—a work in which the poet more

closely than any other being approaches the attributes of the divinity, the sphere of creation being God's peculiar province.

In this the loftiest region of poetry, imitation, however, has its least palpable function, and may be said to consist as much in the poet's characters not doing anything to shock nature, as acting in conformity with its dictates. In this sense, imitation is but the humble handmaid of invention, toiling after her creations, only to be occasionally called in to impart life and animation to the picture. The next step in the descent to a lower ground of imitation is the description of the manners and passions of men; but this imitation is either particular or generic, according as the poet copies actual characters, or follows the ideal types of such existing in his own breast. The former is imitation in its natural or objective sense; the latter is imitation in a minor or derivative sense, and is identical with the representative faculty. In the higher species of poetry, this derivative imitation has wider scope than in the lower, and being more general and complex in its character, has much less tendency to degenerate into objective imitation; while in poetry of a merely descriptive class, as in the common idyl, the poet is too apt to copy real models, and in proportion as he does so, is entitled to less merit, as his delineations to that extent are wanting in ideal truth. In some degree, imitation in either sense pervades all forms of poetry, but in the drama and the complex narrative poem, objective imitation is almost exclusively shut out by the universal and generic character of the subjects, and in the didactic poem and the satire, its range is materially contracted by the discursive faculty, which is only another phase of the inventive element, as by reason and comparison the poet is enabled to put striking thoughts in opposition, and dazzle the mind by flashes of wit, by recondite analogies, and startling antitheses: whereas in the common idyl and descriptive poem, the particular nature of the subject leads the mind to fasten on objective models, and allures it away from the search of ideal

types in itself. This is particularly the case in descriptive poetry, which chiefly consists of a skilful reproduction of rural objects, such as we meet with in the "Seasons" of Thomson and the "Georgics" of Virgil. But even here, there is large play for invention in its lower forms, by the selection of such masses of colour and groups of objects as are calculated to produce the most startling effects. This artistic combination of natural scenery is sometimes only a framework for the loves of rustic people, the reproduction of which must vary in merit, according to the degree in which it embraces the derivative or objective element of imitation. But the range of pastoral poetry is as confined as the minds of the clowns it would represent, and is too apt, when reproduced in our day, to be a copy of the pictures of others, or, in other words, to manifest nothing but reflex imitation, or imitation of the lowest kind.

It is this form of imitation which distinguishes poets of culture from poets of nature. For, the modification of other people's thoughts, the domination of their own ideas by hackneyed images or trite phraseology, is consistent with an exquisite sense of harmony, and with a certain degree of refinement which, in the eyes of the vulgar, are capable of clothing their possessors with the mantle of divine poetry. But notwithstanding the meretricious gilding with which it may be adorned, this reflex imitation will be found to be nothing less than a reproduction of the experiences and thoughts and stereotyped phrases of others; and according as it prevails in poetry, the art degenerates, until we arrive, in purely imitative poets, at the weakest echo of divine harmony, or the most washed-out copy of the ethereal image. The two branches of real imitation, objective and reflex, are allied in copying something external to the mind, just as the two ideal branches of imitation, derivative and creative, are allied in adhering to types which are furnished from within; while in the higher walks of the art, in which the poet lays bare the mysteries of the soul, the mainsprings of man's nature, or the more recondite

laws of the universe, imitation plays the least important part, if it be not submerged in invention altogether. So far, then, from imitation ruling supreme in every branch of poetry, it would appear that the quality of poetry ranges from the lower to the higher grade, according as imitation, in its plain and obvious sense, is departed from, or its sphere is narrowed by the predominance of invention and the representative faculty. In fact, objective imitation and invention are two spheres in poetry, corresponding to the actual and ideal, which increase and diminish in inverse proportion to each other. In descriptive poetry, we get the maximum of imitation with the minimum of invention. In the epos and the drama, this condition of things is precisely reversed. Equilibrium, however, is never established. In the simple narrative poem, the balance is in favour of the objective ; in the didactic and satiric poem, of the inventive or subjective element. But this may be taken as a truth, that according as the actual is incorporated with the ideal, or mere reflex images blended with those of a derivative character, not only the rank of different species of poetry may be fixed, but the merit of poems of the same species may be determined. A descriptive poem in which there is small, will be inferior to a descriptive poem in which there is great, ideality. A narrative poem in which the imitation is derivative, will be superior to one in which the imitation is reflex or objective.

In our conceptions of the actual, we are dependent upon thought and feeling ; but we cannot ascend far into the regions of the ideal, without the assistance of fancy and imagination. It is the relation of these two terms to each other, which throws the main light upon the frontier line between the ranks of different species of poetry. In their origin, Imagination and Fancy were identical, being only two ways, which different nations had, of designating the same subject. What with the Greeks was an appearance, with the Latins was an image. But the tendency of later times has been to desynonomize the two terms, or to erect a barrier of distinction between them.

Imagination, however, we must first recognize, in its secondary poetical sense, as the representative faculty, or the power of reproducing past scenes or events, as they appear to have actually occurred, with which Fancy has little or nothing in common. It is only Imagination in its primary poetical sense which Fancy allies itself with, and frequently seeks to rival; that is, the power which creates, evokes, or aggregates and combines, which unifies the many into one, or disperses unity into many. For both Imagination and Fancy seek different ends by the same means. Some writers would make Imagination consist in the plastic power of forming distinct images, of detecting hidden links of association; and Fancy in linking these embodiments together. But this is a mere arbitrary distinction, having no foundation in the reason of things. The popular idea appears to be, that Fancy is only an exertion upon a smaller scale, of the same faculty of which Imagination is the higher element. Within certain limits, this may be accepted as true; for both processes are to some extent identical, though employed upon different objects, or upon bringing the same objects under different laws. Fancy rather deals with fixed and definite quantities, which refuse to be moulded by any plastic energy; Imagination, with the measureless or the indefinite, which can be contracted or expanded to suit the purpose of the poet. Thus the extent of the ocean, which refuses to be grasped by the sense, Milton adroitly minifies, in order to aggrandize the bulk of the

Leviathan, which God of all His works
Created hugest that swim the ocean stream.*

And again—

There, Leviathan,
Hugest of living creatures, on the deep
Stretched like a promontory, sleeps or swims,
And seems a moving land, and at his gills
Draws in, and at his trunk spouts out, a sea.†

* "Parad. L.," b. i., l. 200.

† "Parad. L.," b. vii., l. 410.

When Dante compares the giants who fought with Jove, rising out of the pit of hell, to the towers of Monteregione looming through the darkness, the impression is one of vagueness and immensity.* But when Shakespeare compares the shape of Queen Mab to an agate-stone on the forefinger of an alderman, we get the exercise of the same faculty upon a scale of circumscribed minuteness. Milton's personifications of Sin and Death are embodiments of the Imagination; Shakespeare's Titania, and her fairies, creations of the Fancy. It would, however, be absurd to deny that both are efforts of the same power to give to airy nothings a local habitation and a name. To realize the idea of vastness, Milton, by a lofty effort of imagination, compares Satan, drawn up to his full height, to Atlas or Teneriffe, with stature reaching to the sky. But Spenser, when he would describe the crest of Prince Arthur, compares him to an almond-tree:

On top of green Selinis all alone,
With blossoms brave bedeckèd daintily,
Whose tender locks do tremble every one
At every little breath that under heaven is blown ;†

which is in conception and execution an effort of the Fancy. Milton, in "Samson Agonistes," likens an over-dressed woman, moving with all her toggery spread, to a ship in full sail. This is Fancy. But in describing Satan exploring his way through the air, no less an image will suit him, as a standard of comparison, than a fleet descried afar off at sea, which seems to hang in the clouds. This is Imagination. The description of morning in Beaumont and Fletcher,

See, the day begins to break,
And the light shoots like a streak of subtile fire ;

and in the elder Marston's "Antonio and Melida,"

Is not yon gleam the shuddering morn that flakes
With silver tincture the east verge of heaven ?

are both instances of exquisite Fancy.

* "Inferno," canto 31, v. 34. † "Faery Queen," b. i., c. 7, st. 32.

But Shakespeare's description of the same object :

The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night,
Checkering the eastern clouds with streaks of light,
And fleckèd darkness like a drunkard's reels ; *

and Byron's :

The morn is up again, the blushing morn,
With breath all incense, and with cheek all bloom,
Laughing away the clouds with playful scorn ; †

and Kirke White's :

Morn, like a traveller girt for travel, comes,
And from his tower of mist,
Night's watchman hurries down ;

and Spenser's :

The joyous day 'gan early to appear,
And fair Aurora from her dewy bed
Of aged Tithon 'gan herself to rear
With rosy cheeks, for shame, as blushing red, ‡

are each instances of the Imagination.

When Shakespeare compares the minutes of our lives hastening to their end, with the waves of the sea rushing to the pebbled shore, this is Fancy ; but when he describes the same waves in a tempest :

Upon the foaming shore
The chidden billows seem to pelt the clouds,
The wind-shaked surge, with high and monstrous mane,
Seeming to cast water on the burning bear,
And quench the guards of the ever-fixèd pole,

Imagination is at work, seeking to transfer the hubbub of the elements to our own minds.

There is also a vitalizing power in imagination—a tendency to clothe inanimate objects with the feelings and affections which

* "Romeo and Juliet," Act ii., sc. 3. † "Childe Harold," c. iii.

‡ "F. Queen," b. i., c. ii., st. 51.

dominate our own breasts, as when Cassio would answer for the safety of the Moor's bride :

Tempests themselves, high seas, and howling winds,
The gutter'd rocks, and congregated sands,
Traitors ensteep'd to clog the guiltless keel,—
As having sense of beauty,—do omit
Their mortal natures, letting go swiftly by
The divine Desdemona.

Occasionally this overmastering effort of passion to bring every neighbouring object within the pale of its influence, would seem to point to kindred associations in nature, as in Burns' Highland Mary :

The flowers sprang wanton to be prest,
The birds sang love on every spray ;

or in the lines of Berni, which make the grass burst into flower around the sleeping Angelica, and the river at her feet babble of love :

Parea che l'erba le fiorisse intorno
E d'amor razionasse quella riva.*

But when the affinities or sympathetic links between inanimate objects have no basis in nature, when they are mere figments of the brain, with little or no connection with feeling or passion, they come under the denomination of Fancy, as in the exquisite lines of Herbert :

Thou lovely day, so calm and bright,
Sweet bridal of the earth and sky,
*The dew shall weep thy fall to-night,
For thou must die.*

When Cowper compares Winter to a grisly old man whose beard is "with steel-like ashes filled," we have an exertion of fancy ; but when Coleridge, by a bold metaphor, describes Winter, in February, wearing upon its slumbering face a smile

* "Orlando Innam.," c. iii., st. 78.

of Spring, he vitalizes nature, and gives us an offshoot of the imagination.

In like manner, when Lochiel informs us how he is a seer—

'Tis the sunset of life gives me mystical lore,
And coming events cast their shadows before,

we have a lofty instance of imagination transferring the property of the sunset to lengthen the shadows of objects, to Lochiel in the evening of his life, who is thus enabled to reveal coming events, before they have invaded man's horizon. But when Aaron, in "Titus Andronicus," bent upon revenge, says,

My fleece of woolly hair that now uncurls,
Even as an adder when she does unrol
To do some fatal execution,

we have an instance of Fancy, or, in other words, an analogy of appearance not founded in nature. The contrary, however, happens when Wordsworth assures us that 'tis his faith that there is not a flower but what enjoys the air it breathes. Here he vitalizes a sympathetic link already existing between the two objects of his thought. But when stretched on his couch, in pensive mood, he recalls a bed of daffodils he had seen fluttering in the breeze, and feels his heart dance with them in one round of pleasure, we have an analogy existing merely in the poet's brain, unvitalized by passion,—that Promethean fire which only can endue lifeless objects with sensuous activity. In like manner, when Keats addresses the moon,

The booming world of waters bows to thee,
And Tellus feels his forehead's cumbrous load,

we have a ripe instance of Imagination; but when Ben Jonson bids the moon

Now the sun is laid asleep,
Seated on thy silver chair,
State in wonted manner keep,*

* "Cynthia's Revels," Act v., sc. iii.

he affords us a good exemplification of Fancy. The nearer the image is to truth, in embodying some law or operation of nature, though less perfect in form, it manifests the imaginative element; the farther from truth, though more complete in form, the element of the fancy; thus when Thomson invites Spring to descend, as if she were a nymph, in a shower of roses upon our plains, he manifests Fancy; but when Byron, in that touching allusion to Howard on the field of Waterloo, sees around him

The wild field revive
With fruits and fertile promise, and the spring
Come forth her work of gladness to contrive,
With all her reckless birds upon the wing,*

he furnishes a splendid example of genuine Imagination. It would then appear that Fancy evokes much less feeling and warmth than Imagination, that it embraces fainter and farther-fetched analogies, possesses less truthfulness, and deals with less pliant or indefinite objects than her elder sister. Fancy is more sportive; Imagination, more saturnine. The more natural sphere of the one is comedy; of the other, tragedy; though both can be grave and gay, according to the occasion upon which they are exercised, or the object calling them forth. Fancy in its lower range is employed in detecting analogies between the artificial creations of society, in sharpening the edge of wit, in enduing the fashions and gaieties of town life with spiritual activity. In its higher range, it is employed about natural objects, and approaches the confines of Imagination. There is, however, a creative fancy as well as an imitative fancy; and the order of creation, in whatever sphere employed, must always take precedence of that of imitation. With this restriction, the distinction between the higher and lower range of Fancy, may be taken as decisive of that between the merits of poetry of the inferior order; for the lowest order of poetry is that entirely divorced from imagination in its primary poetical

* "Childe Harold," c. iii.

sense, being the sphere in which wit rules supreme. The next above it, is that in which Fancy is the paramount element combined with sparse flights of Imagination in its secondary poetical sense.

The merit of poetry of the higher order may be discriminated in a similar manner, and so marked off from the inferior classes of the lower, by the character of the imaginative element prevailing therein. Creative imagination has its broadest range in the highest walks of the epic and dramatic muse. These, therefore, form a class apart. The next order would be that in which the Imagination in its secondary poetical sense, and in the non-creative range of its primary poetical sense, is paramount; which embraces second-rate dramas and epics, and the noblest productions of lyric, narrative, didactic, and satiric poetry.

There is no mark more indicative of genius than the spontaneous ease with which it mounts to general truths, from the ground of particular facts. The lower class of minds are so wedded to sensible phenomena that they seldom get beyond them. They may seize the features of a landscape, or strike off a particular group of figures with great accuracy, or combine into one piece fragmentary beauties which have struck them in nature. But to generalize from individual details, to rise to great truths from partial illustrations of them in external objects, to strike out of some grand synthetical principle its wide manifestations in individual phenomena, or to interweave the general with the particular in one variegated web of reasoning eloquence,—all this is beyond their competency. Take any play of Mason's or Thomson's, or any piece of Glover's or Southey's, and we may wade through miles of verse without meeting with an instance of the kind. But the pages of Byron and Shakespeare bristle with them. Read, for example, the noble reflections on Venice :

The Suabian sued, and now the Austrian reigns—
An Emperor tramples where an Emperor knelt,

Kingdoms are shrunk to provinces, and chains
 Clank over sceptred cities ; *nations melt*
From power's high pinnacle, when they have felt
The sunshine for awhile, and downward go
*Like lawwine loosen'd from the mountain's belt : **

Or see with what facility the same bard sculptures in verse the law which steeps the traditions of the dogeless city in undying freshness :

The beings of the mind are not of clay ;
 Essentially immortal, they create
 And multiply in us a brighter ray
 And more beloved existence : That which Fate
 Prohibits to dull life, in this our state
 Of mortal bondage, by these spirits supplied,
 First exiles, then replaces what we hate,
 Watering the heart whose early flowers have died,
 And with a fresher growth replenishing the void. †

Or behold how spontaneously the poet, after describing the ruins of the Imperial mount, rises, at a bound, to the circular theory of history :

This is the moral of all human tales ;
 'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past,
 First freedom, and then glory—when that fails,
 Wealth, vice, corruption, barbarism at last.
 And History with all her volumes vast
 Hath but *one* page—‡

But a still more apposite example may be found in his enumeration of sweets, where he blends first love with the Hebrew account of the fall, and both with one of the sublimest myths of antiquity :

It stands alone,
 Like Adam's recollection of his fall ;
 The tree of Knowledge has been pluck'd,—all 's known,
 And life yields nothing further to recall
 Worthy of this ambrosial sin, so shown,
 No doubt in fable, as the unforgiven
 Fire which Prometheus filch'd for us from heaven. §

* "Childe Harold," c. iv., st. 12.

† *Ibid*, st. 5.

‡ *Ibid*, st. 108. § "Don Juan," c. i., st. 127.

In the plays of Shakespeare and of the higher dramatists, we are arrested by this felicitous combination of general, with particular truths, at every step. Thus, Hamlet cannot exchange words with Rosencrantz, in a bantering spirit, without enunciating a general principle upon which his remarks were founded :

Ham. Denmark's a prison.

Ros. Then is the world one.

Ham. A goodly one, in which there are many confines, wards, and dungeons, Denmark being one o' the worst.

Ros. We think not so, my lord.

Ham. Why, then, 'tis none to you ; *for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.*

Ros. Why then your ambition makes it one ; 'tis too narrow for your mind.

Ham. *O God ! I could be bounded in a nut-shell, and call myself king of infinite space,* were it not that I have bad dreams.

And lower down, he cannot communicate to the same interlocutors the fact that he has abandoned his customary exercise, without soaring into a description which flushes the earth with ethereal radiance, and lifts man to the highest sphere of created intelligence.*

Even when Hamlet chides his mother, the general and the particular blend their colours in a network of brilliant contrast :

Assume a virtue, if you have it not.

That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat,

Of habits evil, is angel yet in this,

That to the use of actions fair and good

He likewise gives a frock or livery,

That aptly is put on. Refrain to-night,

And that shall lend a kind of easiness

To the next abstinence : the next more easy ;

For use almost can change the stamp of nature,

And master e'en the devil, or throw him out

With wondrous potency. †

An inferior artist, if he had introduced the king interrogating

* Act ii., sc. 2.

† Act iii., sc. 1.

Hamlet about Polonius, would have simply garnished the interview with angry expostulations on both sides ; but Shakespeare makes this simple incident the occasion of a thesis upon human equality, expressed in a form democratic enough to have suited the taste of a Desmoulins or a Robespierre, by pointing to the chemical affinities which link the king with the beggar, and both with the lowest creatures of the earth.*

Now, lesser poets never vitalize great principles by connecting them with particular incidents, or infuse philosophy into occasional incidents by mounting to the abstract truths from which they derive new force and meaning. The most they do is to start analogies, introduce similes and standards of comparison, which occasionally beautify and enrich, but afford a poor substitute for those majestic flights of genius which mount to the empyrean through successive cycles of being having their resting-point on earth. Akenside is a poet of tolerable repute. At least, his "*Pleasures of the Imagination*" is esteemed a British classic. But, though the subject of his poem was peculiarly adapted for flights of this character, he does not afford a single instance of them.† In poets of this class, general truths are always misty and vague, because divorced from their individual manifestations, while these in turn fail to strike the mind with full significance, because they are disconnected with the vital principle from which they derive their activity. It would appear that inferior poets lack that deep insight into the divine harmony of things which enables their superior brethren to trace back to their source the principles which control human action, or to pass with the sweep of an eagle through the vast immensities of being which connect the highest abstract intelligence with the lowest earthly existence. That ladder of principles,—the ascending and descending range

* Act iv., sc. 3.

† Except, indeed, a passage about the optical delusion of two suns in connection with the Newtonian theory of the rainbow, the finest in the poem, which, strange to say, was expunged after the first edition.

of laws, whose foot is on the earth, but whose summit is in the skies,—can only be mounted by the upper ranks of the poetic hierarchy, affording, in this respect, a remarkable contrast to their weaker brethren who are unendowed with wings to poise themselves above the gross material atmosphere of the earth.

The sublime is another source of poetic discrimination, but not so much between different species, as between the merits of poems of the same class. For sublimity is more or less common to poems of every species, though, in the higher walks of poetry, it is to be met with more frequently than in the lower. This necessarily arises from the nature of the case, as heroic characters, such as the epos and the drama call into life, require to be invested with grand conceptions, or surrounded with supernatural agents, who can only be represented by images which fill the imagination with terror, or overpower it with the idea of immensity. Homer, when he introduces Juno hurrying on her chariot to battle, considering the awful distance between heaven and earth, is obliged to make her steeds go at a pace which outstrips the lightning, and comprise within two leaps the limits of the physical horizon :

For as a shepherd, from some point on high,
O'er the wide main extends his boundless eye,
Through such a space of air, with thundering sound,
At one long leap, the immortal coursers bound.

In the same way Milton, when he would impress the mind with the figure of Satan, puts into his hand a wand “tall as the mast of some high admiral,” to support his steps over the burning marle, and gives him a shield as large as the moon, when viewed through a telescope in the most translucent of atmospheres. But when he would describe his hero drawing himself to his full height, nothing less than the tallest of mountains will furnish him with a standard of comparison :

Satan alarm'd,
Collecting all his might, dilated stood,
Like Teneriff or Atlas, unremoved ;
His stature reach'd the sky, and on his crest
Sat horror plumed.

But the storehouse of the sublime is not confined to the employment of great images. The same feeling may be produced by any combination of thoughts which awakens deep pathos, which stirs the passions from their depths, or places us in connection with the infinite. There may be boldness and grandeur in the conception without any feeling of passion, as in the first two books of "*Paradise Lost*," just as there may be intense passion without any loftiness of ideas, as in the odes of Sappho. The one impresses the imagination, the other strikes at the heart. The combination of both is the peculiar privilege of the creative poet ; as, for instance, when he makes Orestes see the Furies so palpably, that the reader cannot help seeing them himself :

Mad Orestes, when his mother's ghost
Full in his face infernal torches tossed,
And shook her snaky locks, he shuns the sight,
Flies o'er the stage surprised with mortal fright,
The Furies guard the door, and intercept his flight.

Again, the feeling of the sublime may be produced without any effort of the imagination, but by a simple representation of fact ; as God said, "*Let light be, and light was*," or as in the noble lines of Pope on the justice of the Deity,—

Who sees with equal eye, as God of all,
A hero perish or a sparrow fall ;
Atoms or systems into ruins hurled,
And now a bubble burst, and now a world.

In the lower walks of poetry, the two elements which enter into these combinations of sublimity are commonly met with apart,—the intuitive sublime, which arises from notions of grandeur or immensity, being oftener met with in the descriptive, and the pathetic or emotional sublime, in the elegiac and lyric poet. In the lines of Pope on the death of an unfortunate young lady, and the ode of Gray on the massacre of the Welch bards, we get good exemplifications of the emotional ; in Thomson's description of the descent of the famished wolves from the Alps, on the approach of winter, an exemplification of the intuitive sub-

lime. But the sublimity of the descriptive genius, at the highest, is inferior to that of the creative genius at the lowest, as the imagination requires to be much more powerfully impressed to realize the mythical than the real. Compare the description of the thunderstorm in Thomson and the tempest in Falconer, with the description of the same phenomenon in "King Lear" and the "Odyssey." The one strikes the mind with the force of the hurricane itself. We are covered with foam. The hail pelts our faces. The thunder deafens our ears. We are driven by the force of the wind to and fro like the trees or masts which crackle above us. The other appears only the description of a picture which we contemplate from an artistic point of view. The creative poet has not only to soar higher, but to keep much longer on the wing. The descriptive poet need not soar at all, and when he does, never to anything like the same height; and he drops from his airy eminence as quickly as he reached it. The flight of the one is that of the plover, who, cuffing the air with seemingly broken pinion, seldom loses sight of the corn-field in which he has enjoyed his last meal. The flight of the other that of the eagle, who, from some lofty peak in the Andes, dries his feathers in the unrisen sun, while the sleeping earth lies dark below.

Even where there is neither grandeur in the naked conception, or deep pathos in the feeling, or boldness in the thought, an impression akin to the sublime may be produced by an adroit use of figures of speech, when a metaphor or simile is made to illustrate a character more truthfully than the laboured narration of an entire life. Who does not see in the words Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Brutus, the hot and choleric, yet forgiving temper of the speaker?—

Oh, Cassius, thou art yokèd with a lamb
That carries anger as the flint bears fire ;
Who, much enforcèd, yields a hasty spark,
And straight is cold again.*

* "Julius Cæsar," Act iv., sc. 3.

Sometimes natural imagery, under the mask of metaphor, is called in to enforce a sentiment, with such elevation of thought, that we cannot refuse to the general effect the epithet of sublime. As when Apemantus tells Timon if he has betaken himself to the country to find flatterers, he has gone to the wrong quarter:

What, think'st thou
That the bleak air, thy boist'rous chamberlain,
Will put thy shirt on warm? Will these moss'd trees,
That have outlived the eagle, page thy heels,
And skip, when thou point'st out? Will the cold brook,
Candied with ice, caudle thy morning taste,
To cure thy o'er-night's surfeit? Call the creatures,
Whose naked natures live in all the spite
Of wreakful heav'n, whose bare unhousèd trunks,
To the conflicting elements exposed,
Answer mere nature ; bid them flatter thee.*

It is the infusion of this element of the sublime, in both or either of its two great branches, which distinguishes poetry of the second rank from other species of a lower order of merit, just as the prodigality of the creative element is the badge by which we distinguish poetry of the first order of merit. Whatever poetry is unleavened with the sublime, cannot be included in the second order, any more than poetry can be included in the first order, which has not a large infusion of the creative element. An ode or an elegy may be beautiful ; either may be exquisitely finished ; but if they excite no deep emotional feeling, or fill the mind with no lofty conceptions, we must, if we would observe a just gradation among the subjects of Parnassus, relegate what is merely beautiful without a spark of the creative element, to a third class sphere. The didactic, satiric, and narrative poem we would serve in the same manner, provided they wére complete in every other respect except in profuse examples of sublimity. But as they frequently lack this element, with other qualities besides, it is evident the base of

* Act iv., sc. 3.

the poetic ranks cannot rest here. The ode and the elegy may want ideal finish, or objective imitation may be thrust too prominently forward, to the detriment of the subjective element, in which case the performance, out of regard to the third class of excellence, must rank beneath it. The other species of poetry in the third rank may be defective from the same cause. We hence get a fourth division, beyond which it would be unwise to go ; for, when the objective element rules paramount, to the exclusion of the subjective, we emerge from the region of poetry into that of fact, which, though invested with all the pomp of versification, remains fact still. The fourth division, therefore, as embracing a portion, though too little, of the ideal element, may be said to rest within the frontier line which divides poetry from the domains of objective reality. We, thus, find ourselves led into the same number of divisions with respect to the merits of poetry, as is frequently adopted for the classification of the poets of antiquity, when they are judged by the standard of the language in which they wrote, and which these poets themselves follow, when they describe epochs according to the degree of innocence or wickedness prevailing therein, as the golden, the silver, the brazen, and the iron age.

CHAPTER III.

CLASSIFICATION OF THE POETS.

ALL poets whose reputations have been fixed by universal suffrage in the most enlarged sense, will be found to have a rank assigned them in one of the four divisions just mentioned, according as the elements which characterize each division predominate in their works. But a poet, to some extent, is as much a product of nature as a plant or a fossil; and nature never proceeds *per saltum*. We must, therefore, naturally expect the place of some few to rest on the boundary line, or to hang midway between two divisions without taking rank in either. It may also be premised that a poet may be first-class in his own peculiar province, and yet only second or third class when viewed in relation to the first division of poetry. Theocritus and Garcillasso are writers of pastorals of the highest order of merit, but the best pastorals exhibit a lack of creative power and the absence of sublimity. They, therefore, are necessarily excluded from the two first divisions, and can only rank in the third. Collins, again, is a first-class lyric; but as the ode is much inferior to the epic, no one would think, on that account, of enrolling Collins in the same rank as Shakespeare and Milton, as one of the monarchs of the spiritual universe. Poets of the same class have their place assigned to them in each of the divisions, much on the same principle as the divisions themselves are constituted, viz., on account of the subservience of the fancy to the imagination, of the imitative to the creative

element, and of the lower range of each of these to the higher, and the interfusion of the sublime with both. The only difference is, that the distance between the divisions themselves is more marked from the lack of some peculiar quality, than that between poets of the same class, which only arises from the intensity or varying degree of the same quality. No one would place Virgil on a level with Homer, though he really has more grace, simply because there is less vigour and force in his original conceptions, and because he is more imitative in the lower sense ; nor Milton on a par with Shakespeare, for the same reason, although his characters unquestionably have more classical finish and more sustained dignity. But in any society, Milton would be placed above Pope, and Pope far more above Prior or Parnel, than Prior or Parnel is above Darwin or Hailey. And the chief assignable reason would be this, that Milton had more of the creative faculty than Pope, and that Pope familiarizes his readers with every branch of the sublime, while his mere imitators rarely do so with any. Nobody now, therefore, would think of placing either Parnel or Prior in the second division, or conferring upon them high rank in the third. But Collins and Burns each evince natural sweetness, Collins with a sublime imagination, Burns with infinite feeling and passion. They therefore rank in the second division as princes of lyric poetry. The works of Cowper and Thomson occasionally manifest sublimity, though not without apparent effort. Fancy, also, in their works, predominates over imagination, and the poetry of objective, over that of representative imitation. They are, in fact, very high descriptive poets, but this only entitles them to the third rank in their art, being a second remove from Milton and Shakespeare. Goldsmith and Akenside, in the same division, supply the connecting link in the order of merit between Cowper and Thomson on the one side ; and such writers as Suckling and Herrick, or Falconer and Parnel, on the other side. The fourth class embraces poets like Glover and Mason, Addison and Ros-

common, in its higher range, and Hailey, Blackmore, and Darwin in the lower, whose works are characterized by the absence of original imagery, and the predominance of reflex imitation. While, if we descend to our laureates—Shadwell, Eusden, Cibber, and Pye—on account of the entire lack of the poetic element, I fear, though they made a considerable noise in their day, that posterity has made up its mind to treat them like a pack of charlatans, and turn them out of the Temple of the Muses altogether.

The distinction between poetry of these various divisions will be found to lie as much in the difference of subject, as in the successful treatment of it. The best lyric and didactic piece not affording sufficient scope for the creative power, are necessarily excluded from the first division. The best descriptive piece, and the best pastoral, not affording sufficient scope for sublime passion or lofty imagination, are necessarily excluded from the second rank. It would, therefore, naturally follow that a second-rate descriptive poem and pastoral would fall into the fourth rank, and a second-rate lyric or didactic poem in the third rank, and a second-rate drama or epic in the second rank. But as the highest species of poetry, viz., the epos and the drama, combine more poetic elements than the lower, they will be found in every grade according to the powers of invention, imagination, or imitation they manifest, taking rank within the division to which their merit belongs. Massinger, Marlowe, and Ben Jonson by no means exhibit the same plastic power as Shakespeare. Their pieces rank, however, in consistency of parts, in imaginative passion, in lofty instances of sublimity, as far above the plays of Ford, of Peele, of Greene, of Middleton, of Otway, quite as much as the pieces of these dramatists rank above the “Sophonisba” of Thomson, the “Zanga” of Young, or the “Elfrida” and “Caractacus” of Mason. I, therefore, place them, along with Beaumont and Fletcher, in the second class, while I relegate the plays of the two inferior orders of dramatists to the third and

fourth divisions, according to the degree in which they combine imagination with fancy, or mere imitation with the representative faculty. Peele, Ford, Otway, and Webster have, however, written plays which belong to the third as well as the second order of poetry. They may, therefore, be regarded as waverers between the two divisions. But Greene, Marston, and Shirley belong exclusively to the third order of dramatists, from their lack of passion and imaginative sublimity. While nothing in the nature of plays which Mason, Young, Thomson, or Addison has produced, could rescue them from the lowest rank in the dramatic art, on account of the redundancy they exhibit of reflex imitation.

The credentials of poets of the highest rank are, perhaps, less exposed to challenge than any other, as the exercise of the creative faculty in its higher range, results in effects so unique as to enchain our admiration for ever. They carry about with them a magician's wand which calls up characters destined to haunt the memories of all coming generations. These are the poets of the creative order. That which to other poets is the model, becomes as it were the slave of their imagination, supplying it with types which they transfuse into a higher order of intelligence. Their creations are, also, upon a scale of grandeur which overleaps the bounds of space and time within which the ordinary imagination is confined. Shakespeare, Homer, Dante, and Milton manifest the power of sublime invention in so prominent a degree as to make it the most conspicuous feature in their works. Mankind have therefore been wonderfully concurrent in placing them in the front rank of the highest division of poetry. In the lower range of the same charmed circle, the three Greek tragedians* have generally found not an unchurlish reception. Though their works have come down to us in a very mutilated state, and though the people who alone could fully appreciate their merits have long since been shattered into dust, the impress which they left upon the

* Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides.

highly-gifted minds of the most fastidious age of Greece, and the magnificent torsos in which their genius is imperfectly reflected, fully entitle them to that distinction. For their Orestes, Antigones, Clytemnestras, and Pylades still suffuse the world with ancient light, and bring each coming generation within reach of the primitive age, when the cries of the Bacchæ startled the nymphs in the groves of Arcady, and mariners encountered the barks of the gods in the Ægean Sea. In their dramas the creative is the principal element, combined with bold imagination or exquisite pathos. After Homer and Shakespeare, their works are the least tainted in any form with reflex, and abound with the loftiest examples of ideal imitation. They are, therefore, entitled to rank next after the first great masters of creative imagination. In the lowest group of the first division, I would place Virgil, Ariosto, and Tasso. For, though each of these poets is distinguished by sublime inventions, though they afford many superb examples of creative imagination, they each adopt the conceptions of their predecessors to so large an extent, as to place them at a respectable distance from their circle. Virgil, however, notwithstanding his habit of copying Homer whenever he gets an opportunity, is distinguished by exquisite grace, by subtile strokes of passion infusing life and warmth into all his characters, and by the power of calling up marvellous pictures by a few strokes of his pencil. Ariosto and Tasso are generally allowed to bear him company by all who enjoy the pleasure of their acquaintance, without the introduction of such sorry versifiers as Hoole, Fairfax, or Harrington. Ariosto, though most unlike the Greek tragedians in other respects, resembles them in this, that his genius has reproduced an age which can never die as long as his language is understood. If behind the other creative poets in grandeur of conception, he certainly is not surpassed by any in fertility of invention, in depth of passion, or in the fidelity of his portraits to nature. The blending of the grave with the gay, of the comic with the pathetic,—a mode of treatment

forced upon him by the sceptical spirit of his age, which had lost all belief in the supernatural,—though it subtracts from that terrible earnestness which characterizes the works of his rivals, affords greater scope and variety to his powers, and enables him to strike monotony out of his narrative. To my mind, Tasso is barely within the circle of the great epic poets; for he stands as much below Dante and Homer as he is above Camoens, and as much above Camoens, as Camoens is above Lucan, or as much as Lucan is above Davenant and Sir Richard Blackmore. At least, such is the position he holds in the general repute, notwithstanding the too eulogistic judgment of Lord Byron, and the too depreciatory judgment of Despreau and Boileau. For he is behind his great compeers in boldness of conception, in sublimity, as well as in fertility of incident and originality of invention; though he need not fear comparison with the foremost in delineation of character, and in moulding a fable of heterogeneous parts into the unity of a perfect whole. To test his inferiority to Milton and Dante, the Pandemonium of either should be compared with the infernal council of Pluto. Milton's and Dante's devils are dethroned spirits, fallen meteors flashing through a dark atmosphere, ruined ministers carrying about with them the pomp of their former state, while splashing us with their fiery talk, or hurling defiance at the gates of heaven. But Tasso's devils are contemptible reptiles provided with horns and tails like those drawn by our grandams to congeal us by the winter fire. As a mark of his inferiority to Ariosto, the coquettish manners of Armida may be contrasted with the voluptuous sensibility of Alcina, and the sanctimonious demureness of Sofronia with the tacit spirituality of Angelica, and the studied proprieties of Clorinda with the passionate tenderness of Olympia. The creative, in Tasso, is not by any means so prominent as the representative faculty, and in the strength of both, he is below his Italian rival. On account of the frequency of his imitations, and the

exquisite finish of his pictures, Tasso more nearly approaches Virgil than any other epic poet, though he rarely attains, even by redundant touches, to that height of the sublime which the Roman reaches by a few masterly strokes. Tasso, however, excels Virgil in discrimination of character, in imparting to his heroes an earnest reality of purpose, as well as in the manipulation of his fable, and in sustaining the interest of his narrative to the end. It would, therefore, be unjust to shut the door upon the Neapolitan, where the Mantuan has been admitted. But these are excellences of the narrative rather than the epic poet, for which reason Tasso may be regarded as marking the boundary-line between the representative and creative order of poetry.

Tasso lies so near the frontier which divides the great creative poets from those of the next, or representative rank, as to afford no room for his imitator, Spenser, to be included in the number. In suffusing a landscape with rosy light so as to mass its colours in startling contrasts, and in imparting to his scenery the grace and harmony of a Claude, the Englishman may be said to surpass his Italian contemporary. He is, also, his superior in that indefinable sweetness which always accompanies ideal beauty; but in depth of feeling, in animated action, in delineation of character, in the invention of incidents to awaken and keep alive the curiosity of the reader, in making variety in the parts of his fable so cohere as to impart strength and unity to the whole,—in all of these Tasso is unquestionably his master. The “*Faerie Queen*” presents us with a succession of pictures of great power, tricked out with inimitable charms of grace and sentiment, but without any connecting link sufficiently prominent to present them to the reader as members of one grand design. We are charmed with isolated fragments—with that pretty prospective, with this woodland group, with this bewitching etching of an angel supporting a wounded knight, with the voluptuous beauty of that nymph mocking the satyr by plunging into the concealing wave, with that scene of blushing

Diana, hemmed in by her nymphs, when surprised by the wanton Faun at her bath—just as we are horrified by the savage and wild scenery he piles up round this cave of despair, and that den of slander, with the filthy duessas and toad-like witches he congregates therein; but amidst all these representations, we are quite oblivious of the poet's fable, simply because he is ignorant of what is the chief art of the creative poet, viz., the keeping alive in the parts of his design the dominant idea which ought to animate the whole. Spenser, therefore, is much praised and little read. There are very few who do not open his volumes at random, but very few who sit down with the resolution to read him through, and still fewer who continue in that resolution to the end. The fact is, the fate of Spenser's characters do not interest us, because they do not wear the semblance of living realities, which arises partly from the mistaken idea of making them the embodiment of some abstract conception, and piling allegory upon allegory until we are lost in a wilderness of personification. Besides, Spenser has stolen a whole armoury of conceits from Tasso, and plundered Ariosto of entire cantos of his immortal epic, which he deliberately transferred to the "Faerie Queen." Reflex imitation and direct thievery on so extensive a scale are surely not to be ascribed to a genius of the highest order. In Spenser, also, fancy oftener supplies the place of the imaginative element than is her wont with the poet whom he so flagrantly copies. It is for these reasons that I think Spenser ought to be excluded from the last range of creative poets, though his great qualities unquestionably entitle him to a very high place among poets of the succeeding or representative division.

Chaucer is usually ranked with Spenser, as the forte of each lay in the representative faculty, and both seem to revel in joyous pictures of external nature, as a sort of background to their subjects. But Chaucer, though possessed of greater abilities than Spenser, did not soar higher than the narrative poem, in which he attained perfection. The characters in the "Canterbury Tales"

are drawn with the hand of a master, and placed in advantageous contrast, so as to strike the eye with rich masses of colouring. The nun and the friar, the squire and the lawyer, jogging along with the merchant and the handicraft-man, while they lay bare to its foundations the structure of contemporary society, which the Church had almost rendered communistic, impress our minds as much with the realities of individual life as if the portraits were the same objective copies as his description of the parlour furniture at the Tabard. But in these, as in his other tales, he makes little use of the inventive faculty, their principal merit consisting in portraying lively sallies of character, instead of surprising the reader by startling creations. In "Troilus and Cresseide" Chaucer had more scope for invention, but he has not availed himself of it. The tale abounds with touches of emotional sublimity, and exquisite descriptions of nature, but is enriched with little incident beyond what is in the original tale itself. Between the story as detailed by Chaucer, and what it subsequently became in the hands of Shakespeare, we may perceive the wide distance which separates the creative from the mere representative poet. But let us be just to the Father of English Poetry. A poet is more or less the product of his age. Had Shakespeare lived in the fourteenth century, his colossal powers would have been, to a great extent, stunted in their growth; and the perfection which Chaucer attained, though in a second-class walk of his art, in the infancy of our language, is one of the greatest marvels of literary history. If he has achieved less in the imaginative element than Spenser, or than either of his Italian rivals, the probability is, had he enjoyed the advantages of their training, and been born to the inheritance of free thought which they enjoyed, he would have outshone even the splendour of their genius.

Spenser excels Camoens in the brilliancy and copiousness of imagery, in the variety, the flow, the energy, and the swell of his versification, in sustained sweetness, and inimitable grace of manner, as far indeed as we would naturally expect a refined

courtier to surpass a rude soldier in polished ease and elegance; but the English poet is inferior to his Portuguese contemporary in boldness and originality of invention, as well as in the art of shaping out of diverse materials the structural unity of a grand poem. Camoens, instead of narrating, as an inferior poet would, the events of Vasco de Gama's voyage in their natural sequence, rushes at once into the middle of his subject, opening his epic with the gods assembled in council, and the hardy Lusitanians upon the threshold of a new world. The appalling phantom which arrests the Portuguese fleet at the Cape, and the island which arises out of the African sea, for the solace of the mariners, have excited the imagination of posterity as much as the boldest strokes of invention in Homer and Virgil. But the wearisome recitals of history, and the geographical details with which he crams his two chief episodes, with the want of vraisemblance in his supernatural machinery, must prevent this poet from rising above the second rank in his art, though Schlegel has the hardihood to place him before Tasso. It cannot, however, be denied that Camoens' defects spring not so much from lack of genius as the want of ordinary judgment. The narrative details might easily have been replaced by some device of his powerful imagination; and by keeping the pagan in subordination to the Christian element, his supernatural machinery would not have startled his Catholic readers out of all feelings of propriety.

The Catholic theology frequently refers the Greek legends to the invention of devils, who, by embodying the passions in sensual forms, sought to keep the human race from the worship of the deity. Camoens himself represents this tradition to the letter, when he introduces Bacchus, in the guise of a Roman Catholic priest, endeavouring to mislead the Christian navigators, that they might not interfere with his empire. Had Camoens always employed his pagan characters as the ministrants of evil, he would have found a legitimate field for their enterprise; but he goes far beyond this in placing the two

systems exactly upon a level. God the Father and Venus can by no freak of the imagination be associated in the same undertaking. Yet the Paphian goddess is represented by Camoens as acting in collusion with Jehovah, in order to inflame the Nereids with love for the Portuguese, and as employing the arrows of Cupid for the propagation of the true faith. Such a grotesque blending of the voluptuous forms of the old mythology with the austere agents of the Christian faith, is as much at war with nature as the embodiment of abstract passions, and the employment of them as dramatic personages in an heroic poem. Naturalness is the great link which binds the ideal to the actual. Without verisimilitude fiction can take no hold upon the imagination. But what likeness to nature can there be in devices which shock popular belief, and outrage all our notions of reality?

The "*Henriade*" sinks naturally enough deep into the third-rate order of poetry, not simply from its comparative inferiority to the other great epics, but from the lack of invention and the predominance of the imitative, over the creative faculty. All the reader gets in Voltaire's epic is the framework of a great design, which the maker had not the faculty to fill up with anything but buckram personages, who may charm us with fine sentiments, but do not in the least interest us in their actions. It is a fine poem, which presents us with no new combinations, but merely springs out of the novel association of the devices of others. The principal element in the machinery arises from the lowest order of imitations. In fact, all that Voltaire has accomplished in the way of originality is to personify fury, discord, and politics; who, each in their several spheres, the one in hell, the other in Paris, and the last in Rome, perform the principal feats upon which the action of the poem turns. But the mind can never, by any art, be seduced into the belief that these personages are anything more than abstract passions, and to make them pass for realities, is as difficult a task as to change the cardinal virtues into animals.

Hence, Homer and Virgil showed their sense in keeping such license within proper bounds. Their personification of slander and fame is only to show the extent to which such things grow out of small trifles. They never thrust them forward, like Spenser, into the heart of an action, or make them the moving agents of a plot on which the progress of the piece depends. They are mere figures of speech, and nothing more. Even Milton, with all his genius, and with the forms of monumental sculpture to help him, when he introduces sin and death parleying with Satan at the gates of hell, makes a call upon our imagination to which credulity cannot respond. We, therefore, lose all interest in a piece which employs agents of a more abstract nature as its principal characters, since the actions which they stimulate arise out of causes not conformable with nature.

Virgil and Tasso, the most imitative of the epic poets, have many inventions which are original. Even the sublime phantom which encounters the fleet of Vasco de Gama while doubling the Cape, or the isle of the Nereids arising out of the ocean, in Camoens, have not their prototype in any other poet. But it is impossible to lay a finger upon any of the devices in the "*Henriade*" which has not its counterpart in some other poet. Henry IV. is detained in the bower of love, as Rinaldo in the gardens of Armida. Henry IV. is conducted into hell like Æneas, where he is made to see, as Bradamante in the cave of Merlin, the illustrious progenitors who are to spring from his loins. This injudicious environment of a modern hero with the myths, suited only to legendary history, strikes, as it were, with atrophy the imaginative parts of the poem. Voltaire, like Lucan, had the misfortune to select a subject for an epic too close to the period in which he wrote; but the Roman showed more discernment than the Frenchman, in keeping his characters out of regions in which they could not appear, without drawing upon their heads the ridicule of a sceptical generation. Lucan is inferior to his French imitator in the artistic manipulation of his fable, because he abounds in objective imitation, or, in other words,

sticks so closely to the world of fact, and intrudes upon his reader so many needless scientific digressions. But there cannot be a doubt, in earnestness of purpose, in pomp of language, in discrimination of character and dignity of sentiment, he is Voltaire's superior. He may also be regarded as his superior in the inventive faculty; for, while the invention of Voltaire is only shown in throwing into new combinations the images of others, that of Lucan springs from placing old characters in strange situations, so affording scope for novel incidents, and enabling him to bring out their salient features by startling varieties of contrast. In both, however, the descriptions are too melodramatic, the sentiments too spasmodic for the chaste simplicity of truth. I, therefore, set down the "*Pharsalia*," as well as the "*Henriade*," in the lower division of the third order of poetry, relegating Glover's "*Leonidas*" and "*Athenaid*" to the same division in the fourth order, where their empty stateliness, their lack of original imagery, well befits both to find a place.

The narrative poem is the evolution of a single skein of fiction, as contradistinguished from the epic and dramatic poem, which interweave the thread of several such groups into the unity of one grand design. In passing, then, from epic and dramatic poetry, we necessarily descend into a lower region of art, wherein the best poets must be content to figure as second class, relatively to those who have exercised, upon a grand scale, the wand of creation with the grasp of a master. Even the moral, lyric, or didactic poet, however excellent his merits, can never expect to attain the same level as a Homer or a Milton. He may have faculties which, as in the case of Chatterton, Chaucer, or Burns, might have enabled him to vie with the loftiest muse in the creative region; but if circumstances have not favoured their cultivation, his merits cannot be tested by what he has not produced. The "*Battle of Hastings*" and "*Tam o'Shanter*" are narrative poems of the very highest class, which prove their authors to have been in possession of great inventive powers, but as these

have not been exercised upon any grand scale, both Chatterton and Burns must be excluded from the first walk of their art. Perhaps, no writer of the English language was so competent as Dryden to execute a great epic—at least, if we may judge from the manner in which he has developed some of Boccaccio's stories, and amplified what he undertook to recast from Chaucer. But this great poet was doomed to cater to the false taste of the public, by wasting his strength upon wretched rhyming tragedies, which were no sooner acted than forgotten. Dryden, then, as well as Chaucer—the one from the necessities of his position, the other from those of his age—may be said to have evinced powers capable of higher things than they achieved; but this would not justify us in placing them among poets of the first class, except in those departments which they have illustrated by their genius.

It is for his relative, and not absolute inferiority, that Pope is also excluded from the first division; for while, from the nature of his subjects, he cannot rank with Milton, he is fairly allowed to be at the head of the moral poets of England. In the heroic comic poem, he certainly has no rival out of Italy. The machinery of his "*Rape of the Lock*," were it not for the burlesque character of the piece, would go far to establish his pretensions to rank with the loftiest masters of song. Out of the circle of epic and dramatic writers, no poet has tried so many kinds of subjects, and succeeded so well in all. In the ode, Collins is superior to him; but Collins expended almost his whole strength on this description of poetry. In slashing strength of satire, he is surpassed by Dryden and Churchill; but Dryden and Churchill choose satire for their peculiar province; while Pope, though pre-eminent in satire, has written the best descriptive poem, "*Windsor Forest*," the first moral, and two of the best didactic poems, in our language, the "*Essay on Criticism*," and the "*Essay on Man*." In the pathetic-sublime, the "*Epistle of Abelard to Eloisa*" has never been surpassed, and rarely, if ever, been equalled. In the intuitive branch of the

sublime, the "Messiah" and the "Essay on Man" afford as many striking examples as any other pieces of equal extent. I, therefore, do not think Pope misplaced where the public have generally agreed to place him, after Chaucer and Spenser, at the head of the poets of the second division of the representative class. After him ranks Dryden; after Dryden, at least in satire, the unjustly neglected Churchill.

We have cited frequent examples of the intuitive and emotional-sublime, as the touchstone by which poetry of the second order may be distinguished from that of a lower range. Tried by this test, Pope, Dryden, and Churchill will be found as distinguished as Horace and Juvenal. Many of Shakespeare's dramatic contemporaries and immediate successors soar into the region of the sublime without constrained effort, and Collins, also, evinces no lack of vigour in the same element. But Gray, who is generally classed with him, has not one spark of Collins' exquisite feeling. His imagery is cold and stately, reminding us rather of antique statuary than the animated action of human life. Hence, the intuitive-sublime with him, though easily attained, is too definite to be of a high order. His noblest conceptions rather resemble the figures on a Greek frieze than those ideal embodiments which place us in connection with the infinite. On this account, Gray's place is on the boundary line which divides the second from the third class of poets, if he be not actually within it. Lucretius excels in what may be called the discursive-sublime, that arising out of deep reflection, recondite analogies, and brilliant sentiment, his exemplifications of which may vie with anything of the sort in the "Essay on Man." He is the poet of reason in its profoundest sense. Petrarch, Sappho, and Ovid, on the other hand, excel in a branch of the sublime which requires less sustained effort but more natural genius. They are the grand masters of love, both in its spiritual and voluptuous aspects—a passion which is never accurately delineated without stirring the human heart from its lowest

depths. The second division, therefore, may be said to contain as many groups as the first division contains single poets, each varying in merit, but all bound together by excellence in one common quality. Spenser and Chaucer bound the line on the creative frontier, while the base of the division, on the representative frontier, terminates with Gray.

The best description which can be given of poetry of the third order is that which would identify it with poetry of the second order, were it not for lack of the element of sublimity, and the power of combining particular incidents with general principles. Both classes of poets equally use material objects only as chords to awaken within us the inner harmonies of our spiritual being ; but the higher are led by their subjects into bold flights of imagination, the lower into excursions of fancy. In the same proportion as fancy occupies the place of imagination, external imitation, with poets of the third order, encroaches on the ground of the representative faculty. The poets of this class never stir the passions to any extent, but touch with masterly hand the refined sensibilities of our nature. They are more distinguished for exquisite taste than depth of feeling. I, therefore, denominate them poets of the æsthetic order, in contradistinction to poets of the creative and representative order. Such are Cowper, Thomson, and Goldsmith, who stand at the head of this division. Their subjects, as in the "Traveller" and "Deserted Village," generally make up for boldness and originality of conception by a keen sense of beauty and by elaborate finish. But when on a large scale, like the "Task," the treatment is fragmentary, or the tone is unequal, as in the "Seasons," whose beauties, like the spring sun, only shine out by fitful gleams. Their pieces, however, when on a small scale, have the perfection of gems, or painting on enamel. Herrick belongs to the middle group of poets of this class; so do Falconer, Drayton, and Cowley, though in different spheres. Blair and Young, Prior and Parnell, occupy the lower region of it. Gay and Denham bring up the the rear.

The peculiar subjects of this third division are pure descriptive, pastoral, and ballad poetry. In pastoral we do not flourish so much as our southern neighbours ; for our churlish climate will not allow us to place Amaryllas and Corydons under orange-groves or fig-trees, and our swains appear to bad advantage after the plastic creatures of Greek imagination. Tickell, Mallet, and Shenstone—the two former by their ballads, and the last by a few of his pastoral eclogues and his “Village Schoomistress,”—belong to this division of poetry, though the great bulk of their other poems would assign them a place in the fourth class. They therefore, like Gray, rest on the frontier, or like Chaucer, Dryden, Pope, and Burns, may be denominated waverers, or poets who, while they belong to an inferior division, evince talents which, if properly directed, would have raised them to a higher rank.

The distinction between poetry of the third and fourth order is not difficult to seize. It is in fact the distinction between mixed imagination and fancy, and fancy alone ; between derivative and direct imitation ; between the spiritual and the material, as confined to those writers who never soar to the sublime, but whose merit consists in elegance of expression and accuracy of objective description. The poets of the third rank use the material as an introduction to the spiritual, those of the fourth rank, the spiritual as the handmaid to the material. They may, therefore, be denominated poets of the sensuous order. In the description of the one, the spiritual element is always uppermost, moulding the material to its purposes, till it claims a close kinship with the offsprings of the imagination. In the descriptions of the other, the sensuous predominates ; the poet throwing into prominence the corporeal qualities of objects, rather than seeking to impress the mind through the imagination and the heart. Take as an illustration Herrick and Carew. Both have left us animated portraits of female beauty. But in Herrick, the features are only known through the inner light, which uses them as a vase for the manifestation of its

splendour ; while in Carew, we get a combination of material properties only, without any spiritual significance. Poets of this class abound in stereotyped phrases and figures of speech, which have not an atom of originality. Clever city wits, like Suckling, Waller, Swift, and Rochester, hold the highest rank among them. The next in order, though in a different sphere, are such writers as Beattie, Glover, and the two Wartons. The middle region is occupied by Addison, Garth, Fenton, and Roscommon ; and in the direct boundary line we meet with Hailey and Darwin. All beyond are mere versifiers, of whom we can take no account. If a man chooses to master chemistry, and throw the facts of that science into pleasing pentameters, that does not make him the less a chemist and more of a poet. Empedocles, when he threw his natural history into verse, still remained a naturalist. Otherwise, we should have pedagogues climbing up the hill of Parnassus, with the Latin grammar in rhyme on their back. The metre is but the dress that constitutes the framework of the poet's limbs, and the inner soul which animates them, is the power he possesses of entering into the inner shrine of the universe, and revealing the occult harmonies of the spiritual sphere, which permeate all material forms, and make this great globe itself but the external embodiments of its splendour. But in Broome, Hammond, Sandys, Pitt, Whitehead, Cumberland, Shadwell, and the Laureates who intervened between the two, and in the whole tribe of Pope's second class imitators, we can discover nothing of the true functions of the poet, but only the external wrapper or form, which can no more exalt prosaic conceptions, than the lion's skin could endue with ferocity the servile beast who clad himself therewith to frighten the denizens of the forest.

So far, then, it may be taken for an axiom, that where we get great creative power, many-sidedness, and a conjunction of grand conceptions with the emotional sublime, there we have first class poetry, and where any of these qualities are wanting, first class poetry is not. It may also be as readily granted, that

the class of poetry next in order is where there is a lack of creative power, but frequent instances of either of the two sources of the sublime combined with a prominent manifestation of the representative faculty. From this level the next step in the descent to the third or æsthetic order, is the rarity of any instance of the sublime, with great vigour of description, in which the spiritual dominates over the material. The lowest step of all lands us on that ground where we get inferior combinations of the imaginative and representative elements in second-rate descriptive poetry, and where flights of fancy and sallies of wit are substituted for sublime bursts of passion, and the spiritual manifestations of beauty. This is not the sphere of ethereal types, but of material embodiments. Beyond the frontier of this sensuous region, we come in contact with the dreary wastes of the actual, in which most commonplace characters are content to spin out the great bulk of their lives.

CHAPTER IV.

INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS.

WHAT are the relations of genius to the age in which it appears? How far do they mutually influence each other? Is it necessary for the production of a great poet that the age in which he lives should be strongly tinged with romance, or contain within it a dash of the marvellous? Such are some of the questions which are often arbitrarily decided, or in fact assumed to be solved, upon insufficient grounds. There are two or three generally admitted facts in connection with this matter. Every age, to a greater or less extent, impresses certain marks upon the writers belonging to it. The writers of Queen Anne may be easily distinguished from those of the Restoration, and both in turn from the writers of the Elizabethan period. It has also been noted that, during four or five great world-epochs, the human intellect has appeared in far greater force than at any other times. The great luminaries of the intellectual horizon have not been distributed equally over certain even portions of time, but have clustered round periods which have been most distinguished for æsthetic refinement, for startling social change, or for grand political culminations. It may, also, be admitted that the poets of the highest creative genius have flourished before science achieved its conquests, and before men's minds were engrossed by practical

pursuits, or disciplined by philosophic thought. When the fields of Nature lay for the most part unexplored, and when men were guided more by their emotions and acute sensibilities than by their practical reason, the imagination attained its highest flights into the regions of the unknown. Then were moulded, in the poetic armoury, those shafts which have sunk deepest in the human breast. Homer flourished in the infancy of the ancient, Dante in the infancy of the modern, world. Shakespeare and his dramatic contemporaries preceded, if they did not prepare, the way for those scientific discoveries which culminated in Newton. Ariosto flourished before Galileo, who candidly confesses his obligations to a writer whose pursuits were so opposite to his own. Milton lived at a later period, but his mind was alien to those inductive processes which were then beginning to lay the foundations of modern science. If France and Germany have produced no poets fit to contend with those of England and Italy in the highest walks of creative genius, it would appear because their philosophers had the start of their poets. Descartes preceded Corneille; and the German metaphysicians, before Goethe or Schiller appeared, had thrown back many of the veils which hide, in their dim, mysterious folds, the arcana of man's spiritual nature.

Upon some such grounds as these, it has been determined that a writer is but the organic expression of the voice of his age, and that if the times in which he lives be prosaic, his utterances must, in the main, be prosaic also. But a great poet, though to some extent the product of his age, is, by the irresistible attributes of his greatness, raised so far above it as to be regarded as a seer, directing his contemporaries into the fertile regions of the future, and illuminating his own times with a splendour with which they have little in common. It may, indeed, be a question how far such a mind can expand in an atmosphere spiritually stagnant, in an age which evinces no signs of motion except that of plunging backwards.

But, unquestionably, a poet born in such an age, who, instead of infusing into it higher instincts, simply reproduces in his works its existing tendencies, can hardly be called "great" in the proper sense of that term. To entitle a writer to that appellation, it is essential that he dominate his age, no matter however high may be its intellectual level. But if that intellectual level be low, the loftier must be the region, the higher the distance at which he soars above it. All poets exemplify the breadth or contraction of their genius, in proportion as they dominate their age, or merely reproduce its elements. The Restoration poets, who reflected the dissolute tendencies of their age, or the poets of James I., who mirrored forth its pedantic conceits, or the poets of Anne, whose pages are merely an echo of the French taste of the time, do not occupy a high shelf in our literature. But Milton stood aloof from the bacchanalian revels of his contemporary brethren, and wrote his great epic with his ears only open to the harmonies of the spheres; and Shakespeare and his dramatic contemporaries looked down with similar contempt upon the controversial fanaticism which comprised the main intellectual ferment of their day, their vision being absorbed by that insight into the beauty of the spiritual universe with which they have enriched all time. There was nothing in the Georgian era to stimulate the rapture of Collins; but, on the contrary, an amount of German phlegm and dullness calculated to nip it in the bud. Yet the poet, if we follow the sublime bursts of imaginative passion with which he illuminated a blind age, seems to have breathed an atmosphere of fire and air. Burns' brief manhood was surrounded by the blighting spectres of a fanatical religion, but he soared beyond them into the sphere of living reality. His whole existence was a protest against the prosaic conventionalities which attempted to stifle his splendid genius. A great writer may exercise little or no influence over his contemporaries, as they may be too dull or too prejudiced to appreciate or comprehend him; but if he allows himself to be dominated by them, it is an infallible sign

of intellectual weakness. When the age, in which a great poet lives, is filled with striking revolutions which change religions or subvert dynasties, or which overpower the mind by letting loose the floodgates of thought, or fill it with tragic images of terror or pity, he may contemplate the scene in seclusion, and, nevertheless, feel himself carried away by the current. But if the times be stagnantly dull, it rarely, if ever, happens that a great poet can pass his days in retirement, without experiencing such a break in his fortunes, as is calculated to rouse his feelings from their lowest depths. The mind must be profoundly stirred some way that the diapason of melody may be brought to its full height. Either the private man must undergo a series of conflicting shocks, or the times into which he is born must present the appearance of considerable demolition and reconstruction. Milton lived through the convulsions of the Commonwealth; Chaucer fled to France after espousing the cause of Bolingbroke; Dante was exiled by the factions of Florence; Collins was driven mad by the collapsed state of his finances; Petrarch was crazed by love; Tasso both by love and fortune. The poets of the Augustan, Leonine, and Elizabethan epochs I place out of the account, as they lived through one of those moral earthquakes which bury religions and dynasties in their devastating career. Gray lived in a dull, stationary age, very quietly on his college foundation, in the dreary flats of Cambridgeshire; but Gray, with the exception of two or three short pieces, is not entitled to preeminence, and cannot, therefore, be called a great poet in the large sense of the term. The history of literature presents us with hardly a single instance of a first class poet in any eminent branch of his art, living through one of those stagnant levels which may be regarded as the wastes of intellectual existence, in comparative luxury and seclusion, without a breath of change to ruffle his repose.

It would, indeed, appear that all great poets have spent their lives in struggle and agitation, the outside world writing its experience on their hearts in characters of flame; while the

inferior class have been more prone to rustic retirement, to the cultivation of the society of tulips rather than man, and to all the solitary blandishments of a country life rather than to the stormy contests of the world. Active life is the oxygen which supplies the flame upon which the subjective element feeds. Periodical contention, in the language of Young, not only

Defecates the student's stagnant pool,

but makes solitude more impressive. It is, in fact, the storm arising out of the efforts of a supple intellect to control or overbear the impetuous torrent of adverse fate, which constitutes one of the chief phases of poetic greatness. Contrast Thomson sauntering in the gardens of the Countess of Dorset, snatching peaches with his lips, being too idle to reach them with his hand, or writing in bed, at noon, on the advantages of early rising, with Chaucer driven away from home and kindred by the storms of rival dynasties, or consuming his great heart in prison walls. Compare Shenstone in his garden, training his orchards or constructing his mimic waterfalls, with Tasso wandering over Italy with no rest for the sole of his foot till lodged in the mad-house of Ferrara, or with the vagrant Otway pining for bread, or with Collins shrieking his wild complaints round the walls of Chichester cathedral, or with Milton cuffing with his proud wing like an imperial eagle the storm which shattered his republic into the dust, and drove him into a garret. It would appear as if blighted affection, the sorrows of exile, some dangerous enterprise, or heart-tearing ordeals, were necessary ingredients to the full development of a poet's powers. The happiest efforts of Cowper's muse reflect his retiring disposition and the calm unruffled tenor of his daily life, just as the stormy career of Spenser and Milton has left its traces in the more vigorous and fiery emblazonments of their verse. Spenser's fancy delighted to paint daring feats of chivalry in enchanted forests, or in connection with the frowning battlements and terrific chambers of haunted castles; while Milton, still more

magnificently, employed his gorgeous imagination in contrasting the beautiful innocency of Eden with the dark abyss fitfully illumined with the baleful glare of fallen angels. During the composition of these fictions, Spenser resided in the midst of savage insurgents, with the nightly cries of rapine and murder resounding in his ears ; and Milton lived with the avenging sword of the State suspended by a hair over his head. A poet's works necessarily take the impress of the life which he leads, as his faculties are tutored by obstacles which interfere with the attainment of his wishes. In the inimitable grace of Virgil's manner, and the harmonious flow of his versification, we catch the tones of one accustomed to the pomp and luxury of courts ; while the storm and pressure in the " *Iliad* " recall the blind old bard, whose life was a continual march through cities, which repudiated his existence while living, only to contend for him when dead. Pope and Dryden lived in daily contact with the most polished wits of the capital, through an age pregnant with dynastic change and political revolutions. There is, however, little hurricane in their verses, simply because there was none in their lives. Had either of these men drank as deeply of the cup of sorrow as Dante, had either like him been driven a houseless wanderer over the earth, it is probable that both would have left behind them some monument which would have equalled his in glory.

Gray, doubtless, would have proved greater than he really is, had he not passed the prime of his existence in collegiate cloisters, without any reverses to stimulate his genius, alternately occupied between the use of the file and the employment of his muse upon objects beneath his powers. For, when a poet has no experiences of his own, he is driven to imitation, by registering the experiences of others. Even the life of Burns, simple as it was brief, is crowded with bitter reverses, with passionate ecstasies of triumph, with blighting repulses, with broken hearts, with keenest anguish over departed loves, breaking in upon the mirth of convivial enjoyment. Had the poet not

left his plough by the mountain-side for renewed intercourse with humanity, the joys and sorrows of domestic life, the raptures of successful, and the pangs of despised love, could never have been portrayed with such exquisite pathos, or refined sensibility. I very much question whether the two Wartons, who enjoyed more fame than their rustic contemporary, and who either had, or professed to have, the same keen appreciation for the beauties of nature, ever felt the glow of real passion in their hearts. Their lives were passed in scholastic retirement, without any event to discharge the electric shock of grief deep into their souls, and swell their hearts as with the uprising of an earthquake. Their poems are, therefore, tame and conventional, not natural plants, flowering the regions of sensibility in which everybody loves to roam, so much as sickly exotics, which cannot flourish out of the hot-house or the drawing-room. It is quite possible that a great mind in troublous times may sequester itself in solitude, deriving its objective nutriment from the effects of the moral whirlwind which is convulsing society beyond his sphere, and shattering the institution of centuries within an hour. But without feeling or witnessing grand images of terror or pity in others, or experiencing them himself, a poet is obliged to have recourse to second-hand sources for his emotions, to fill up the void in his own heart with the creations of others, which deprives his own of that originality so essential to their greatness.

Another characteristic of great poets is the adoption of some field of thought, or of some region of spirituality peculiar to themselves. In one word, their strong individuality of conception stamps upon all their works those peculiar features which make them a distinct intellectual heritage for the human race. In Shakespeare we have all the variegated incidents of romantic life, combined with the general laws of humanity. There is no circumstance, however minute, in his dramas, but assumes a philosophic aspect. It is the union of the particular with the universal. His most trifling details arouse slumbering

symphonies by touching the mainspring of the general chords of the human breast. Spenser blends all the romance of chivalry with the Greek's refined conception of sensuous beauty; and Milton unites the latter element with the profound spirit of the Hebrew religion. Collins has invested classical forms with the ethereal mantle of spirituality. He has vitalized with the deepest feeling the old stock of poetic imagery, until its most obsolete redundancies strike the mind with the force of new conceptions. Burns opened out a new region by appealing, in an age of shams, to the common feelings which bind men in one brotherhood of humanity. Wordsworth took as his special field the unappropriated domain of the philosophical relationship between man and nature. Byron idealized passion, till all its sensuous traits, while preserving their original fire, were submerged in the spiritual feelings which love always awakens in lofty natures. Shelley made his imaginative mind the channel for electrifying the heart with the intellect and spirit of the Alexandrine philosophy. Keats transposed into poetry the sentient spirit of the same philosophy, which constructed a religion out of its passion for the beautiful. Thus, every great poet has his special mission. His peculiar idiosyncracies are so strongly marked, as to lead him to appropriate some distinct domain for the exercise of his genius. He, as it were, sets his mark upon it, and claims it for his heritage, without the admission of any copartnership whatever. By crossing hybrid systems, or by enduing ancient ideas with fresh juvenility, or by investing antiquated beliefs with modern meaning and significance, they perpetually breed new thoughts, keep our nature in the glow of perpetual youth, neutralize the deadening influence of habit, and infuse new blood into the intellectual arteries of the world.

We may, therefore, take it for granted that all great poets have either lived in times of startling change, or undergone great revolutions in their private fortunes. It may also be regarded as unquestionable that each has dominated his age, or soared above it, not in a political, but in a moral and

æsthetic sense. It may, also, be held with the same degree of certainty, that every great poet has carved out for himself some distinct field of thought, or striking region of spirituality as his own peculiar province. Wherever these three great characteristics are found, there is lofty poetry. But where they are wanting, lofty poetry is not.

CHAPTER V.

ENGLISH SCHOOLS OF POETRY.

POETRY may be viewed not less in relation to the faculties of the mind it calls into operation, or to the subjects selected for its display, than to the sources from which it is derived, and the manner or style of execution. It is with reference to the two last lights that the phases of this department of literature have become so marked as to give rise to distinct schools.

The peculiar qualities of English poetry may be traced up to three distinct sources. The Oriental or Scriptural represents the attributes of the Deity, as they are manifested in His works. All the operations of nature are set down to the direct intervention of an overruling Providence, whose essence is reflected in the soul of man. Hence a kinship is established between God and humanity unknown to the literature of Rome and Greece. Man is withdrawn from the control of the senses, and taught to dive into the mysteries of his own heart. He is treated not simply as a moral agent, but as a child of the Father of the universe, and, as a son, learns to regard the Deity with reverence and filial affection. He looks upon heaven as his natural home, and the angels as his present helpmates and future companions. From this source arises that earnestness of purpose, that profound reflection and purity of feeling, which make the higher order of English poets stand out in advanta-

geous contrast to the heathen bards of antiquity. In Milton this spirit culminates in startling magnificence, without contracting the intellectual sphere, which it invariably does, in less gifted poets. The whole spirituality of man's nature is laid open to its profoundest depths. We fancy we hear the wheels of Jehovah's chariot thundering above our heads, or feel the sounds of his shouting quires of angels vibrate in our ears. The most impressive poetry of classical antiquity seems cold and unimpassioned, when contrasted with that arising out of the revelation of the hidden thoughts which connect man's destinies with the throne of the Eternal. But poetry of this nature, when unassociated with great breadth of intellect, and when exclusively directed to the cultivation of mere devotional feelings, is apt to fall into wearisome repetitions, stereotyped phraseology, and circumscribed views, which generally conspire to deprive the religious school of poetry of a high order of merit. It is only as the ally of the æsthetic element, as freighting the glad spirit of sensuous poetry with serious aims, as reinforcing the objective tendencies of the imagination with profound analytical soundings of the human heart, that the Oriental source has made its influence powerfully felt in our literature.

The next source is that of the Greek or classical, which supplies the element Oriental poetry most lacks—that is, perfection of external form, and that spirit of sensuous beauty which the Hebrews so ruthlessly banished from their homesteads and temples. The body resumed its empire over the soul's conceptions of the invisible world. The sense of voluptuousness, the power of the passions, the motive agents of the universe, were all invested with human forms of ethereal splendour, until the body became not the dead shell or transient receptacle of the soul, but the everlasting manifestation of spiritual activity. To nurture this spirit of physical beauty, until it actually scaled the sky, and peopled heaven with its creatures, the climate of Greece powerfully contributed. The clear translucent sky of

the peninsula, its blue crystalline seas and glassy lakes, reflecting in their quiet depths all the hues of a variegated atmosphere—ever suffusing the earth with flushes of light as brilliant as the tints upon a ringdove's neck,—these, combined with its hill-tops, which seem to step out of the clouds and invite the gods down into the flowery nooks of its sinuous valleys, ever curtained with ilex and pine forests,—the influence of all these aggregate charms fostered, in the Greek, that gay and sunny spirit which made him regard the cultivation of his æsthetic nature as the chief end of existence. The perfection of form and distinctness of outline he found in the material types around him, he transferred to art. Hence, in poetry as in sculpture, unity of design, arising out of a proper consideration of parts, exact symmetry of proportion and exquisite finish of detail, combined with the harmonious coherence of the whole, became a necessity of his position. Every production had its nature, and must be regulated by its own specific laws. The plastic powers of the imagination were brought under the rule of an austere simplicity. Improproprieties of detail, all minor ornaments which did not fit into the parts of a great structure, were discarded as incongruities. The region of poetry, by the Greeks, became in this way mapped out into distinct compartments; and each of these was governed by its own code of formulisms. This makes Greek poetry more national than that of any other nation; for, with the Greeks, poetry was not a mere plaything: it was the breath of their soul. In the epos and the ode, it animated the outer phases of their sensuous life: in the drama it embodied their religion. When the Greek liberties were destroyed, the genius which vitalized their poetry passed into philosophy. The triumphs of Pindar and Æschylus at Athens, were dimmed by the reverses of Plotinus at Alexandria. But, though the forms of Greek poetry have long since become practically dead, its spirit still survives in the sense of voluptuous beauty which characterizes the feminine creations of Spenser and Shakespeare, and the classical finish,

the unity of design, and the matchless symmetry which Tasso and Milton were enabled to impart to their great epics. Its effects, however, are destined to be most felt in alliance with that philosophy supposed to have been its grave ; for Shelley and Keats have made that philosophy instinct with poetic life. While discarding the dead forms of Greek poetry, they have made its spirit animate with its youthful fires the philosophic element in which it subsequently became entombed, and rise like a phoenix from its ashes.

In startling contrast with the Greek, is the Northern or Gothic source of poetry, which sprang out of the new manners engrafted by the Teuton hordes upon the decaying branches of the Roman Empire, and the refining influence exercised by the Christian faith over their wild feelings and emotions. The conflicting elements of the new social structure impressed themselves upon the art-conceptions to which they gave birth. Lawless irregularity was substituted for the symmetrical development of Greek unity, and the more horrid embodiments of superstition, for that magical perfection of form which moulded all the Greek conceptions of the supernatural world. Even the Hebrews avoided giving animated form to the powers of evil. Satan was with them a mere figure of speech. But the imagination of the Gothic tribes peopled the air with demons, and threw out, into startling prominence, the Persian element of the Christian faith. The gloomy forests, the vast morasses, the wild and inclement regions in which the northern tribes encamped rather than found a home, filled their minds with images of terror. They started dragons in every cave, and encountered spirits in every wood. When the lightning was abroad, careering round the mountain peaks, they imagined monsters were spitting fire at them from the top of every cloud-capped cliff, which assumed, in the distance, the appearance of an enchanted castle. When these people broke in upon the Roman Empire, they infused their melancholy natures and gloomy superstitions and predatory habits into the races

whom they conquered. From the blending of the barbarous with the Christian element, and of both, with the decaying embers of antique civilisation, arose that spirit of medieval chivalry, which, in its religious aspect, culminated in the frowning *commedia* of Dante, and, in its romantic aspect, in the wild and grotesque inventions of Ariosto. The troubadours and the courts of love were but the sentimental phase of that state of society which derived all its activity from tournaments and the crusaders. Romantic poetry constituted the very pulsation of medieval life. Its art, its religion, its practical business, its habits of reckless adventure, its knight-errantry, were only so many manifestations of the same spirit. Though most of the extravagancies of these ages have past away, they have left germs behind them, which have moulded, to no inconsiderable extent, the manners and institutions of the present century. The spirit of individual freedom and heroic enterprise, the chivalrous devotion to women, the purer moral feelings awakened by every phase of Christianity, the subjective tendencies of modern thought which have grown out of man's deeper communion with his own nature,—all these things have their roots in medieval times, and impart to the romantic poetry of our own day many of its characteristic features. Indeed, this class of poetry is but the stream or mirror in which the medieval age reflects its noblest aspects, and preserves its loftiest aspirations. It is the connecting link by which we trace back our lineage, which would otherwise appear to us mysterious and unknown. Though the region of credulity is contracted, though the seer has long since descended from his eyrie, though nature now moves under the guidance of well-defined laws, the romantic poet still loves, on mountain and in forest, to commune with the creatures of his own imagination—to coerce beings from the frontiers of the invisible world, that they may uplift the veil from futurity, or expound to him the mysteries of life and death. But these later manifestations of the Gothic school have not, like the Greek,

any reference to popular mythology, or recognised philosophical system, but rather seek in strange elements of the supernatural, and daring combinations of design and adventure, new regions for the expansion of the intellect.

These three sources of poetry, mixed with other elements arising out of the customs and fashions of different epochs, furnish the distinguishing features which separate groups of poets from each other, according to the manner and style of their execution. For the law of reaction is felt as widely in art, as elsewhere. When one style in poetry has been cultivated to excess, men get weary of its repetition. A new generation brings with it fresh habits of thought, or a new range of sympathies, and the old system is absorbed in the new birth. In England, these fluctuations have been controlled in a great measure by political events. The Troubadours, who were the first to clothe the spirit of chivalry in a poetic garb, left little impress either upon our manners or our language, both being in their time too rude to mirror the delicate conceptions of female gallantry ; though in later days our literature has amply made up for its shortcomings, in this respect, by a crowd of representatives, who allow an overweening devotion to women, to colour all their thoughts. The birth of English poetry, however, was tempered by more masculine elements, the tone of which it has preserved, to a greater or less extent, through the subsequent stages of its growth. It was not till Wickliffe had profoundly stirred the thought of the country, and a discrowned king set loose all those feelings which had looked up to the throne as the seat of divinity, that Chaucer arose to invest the incidents of every-day life with ideal beauty, and stamp the legends of his day with the impress of a natural imagination. Society, after maintaining for centuries something like a Chinese equilibrium, was beginning to move from its bases. He, therefore, dived into the recesses of his own nature, and painted everything, not according to the colours with which superstitious feelings or iron-handed custom had invested them,

but according as they were imaged in the clear depths of his own mind. With Chaucer, then, may be said to have commenced the natural school which, though frequently eclipsed by the vagaries of taste, has always revived in the crisis of great social convulsions. During the age of Elizabeth, everything was in a ferment. Thought was leavened with new ideas: men's minds agitated with great conceptions, found expression in language of the most natural character. Poets painted man as they found him, not the offspring of a complex system of society, with artificial tastes and conventional sympathies; but as a being endued with genuine feelings, and moving under the impulse of his own convictions. But these embodiments, under the iron rule of the Tudors, in order to be free, had to take a dramatic form, in which the natural simplicity of the characters became more transparent from being struck out of the poetic mint, without any foreign models to spoil, with sophisticated tints, the native force of the conception. By steeping their minds in bygone revolutions, the dramatists of the Elizabethan epoch escaped the blemishes of their age, and were enabled to reflect in their productions its freedom of thought unsullied by a taint of its religious ferocity. It was not until James for a while had extended his leaden sceptre over us, that poetry strayed from the pure regions of nature to become scholastic. The foible of the day was verbal disputation and the subtilties of the school divinity. The muse lost herself in a maze of pedantic conceits. It is singular that when physics were first beginning to cast off the quibbling entities of the cloister, the muse should have donned the discarded drapery. But such were her courtly propensities during the reign of the earlier Stuarts, that she arrayed herself in scholastic conceits, quite as eagerly as the fine gentleman of the period took to lace and ruffles. We find the fashion more or less predominant in every poet of the epoch, to a rampant degree in Donne and Cowley, in a mitigated form in Waller, Herrick, and Herbert. There were, however, authors who

strove to give this bent its natural direction, the efforts of whose muse may be said to have resulted in the birth of the didactic poem. When Sir John Davies wrote his piece on the immortality of the soul, Drayton his "Polyolbion," and Denham his "Cooper Hill," they were each, in a different style, unconsciously laying the foundation of a new department of their art. Johnson has designated all these writers as metaphysical, an unpardonable application of a term frequently condemned for want of meaning. It would be juster to call the former the scholastic, the latter the philosophic school of poets. But the scholastic was only a passing form reflecting the corrupt taste of an ephemeral epoch. The latter, so far as it allied philosophy with nature, is destined to remain an enduring monument.

The scholastic poets, with all their pedantry, had still a dash of natural imagery at the bottom of their conceptions. They, however, prepared the way, if they did not half advance the nation on the road to a state of things in which unsophisticated nature was destined to disappear altogether. Up to the end of the Commonwealth, the national muse owed no obligations to any foreign source but the Italian, and in a very secondary degree to the Spanish; and these were limited to the plots our dramatists used to steal from Calderon, and to Spenser's imitations of Tasso, and the quaint conceits the scholastic poets pilfered from Marini. But the star of French dominion was rising, and with it the influence of her literature. While the Puritan government assisted the one, it sedulously erected a bulwark against the incursions of the other.

At the Restoration the change was felt in rhyming tragedies and the substitution of spasmodic for genuine sentiment. The muses debauched at Court no longer selected for their themes natural objects, but the refined manners of polished society. Instead of artless nymphs reclining with dishevelled locks by the founts of Helicon, they stepped out of the drawing-room, like conventional belles, glittering with conceits, and bristling with epigram. Bold strokes of invention were abandoned for

mere elegance of language ; sublimity of description for lively sallies of wit ; genuine pathos for refined sentiment ; spiritual analogies of fancy and passionate bursts of imagination for stereotyped figures of speech and elegant antitheses. Man was considered not in relation to the universe of which he is the crowning feature, but as a being whose destinies are pent up within the narrow range of civic life. The picture of humanity was set, not in a magnificent framework of glen, pine forest, and mountain interfused with heaven-reflecting lake and ship-freighted ocean, but cooped up within a far more confined arena, of which the mall, the park, and the exchange constituted the foreground. Love became coquettishness ; passion, rant ; and genuine feeling, conventional sympathy. So deeply did the change affect the taste of the period, that the plays of the Elizabethan dramatists could not be endured, and the poems of Chaucer, Spenser, as subsequently those of Milton, were allowed to sleep in oblivion. Even Shakespeare had to be re-written to suit the coarse palate of the epoch. It would appear as if the debauched manners of the Stuarts and the slavish political maxims which their restoration revived, by destroying the germ of free thought, had brought the mind of the nation to the last stage of decrepitude. Genius may withstand social corruption, while politically free, and even political thralldom, if manners are undebauched by coarse sensualities. But it never yet has been found to survive the corrosive influence of these conjoint forces for two generations together.

This, which I would call the material, is usually denominated the French school of poetry ; I do not know from what cause, unless it be from the feeling that nothing but what is good can spring from ourselves, and that, if there be any evil, it must be imported from our neighbours. But the fact is, there are two elements in it, the worst of which undoubtedly sprung from that reaction against Puritanism which drove the nation into depraved courses, as a natural protest against the whining austerities by which it had been oppressed.

The other element is the conventional, which we may ascribe to the French without wounding their too delicate susceptibilities; for, it left legitimate effects permanently behind it, long after the slavish maxims of the Stuarts, and the influence of the Puritan reaction, had passed away. Our Gallic neighbours have always been haunted with the idea that they are the Greeks of the modern world, born to keep alive among mankind that passion for beauty of form and symmetrical design they inherit from antiquity. Hence, their predilection for Greek subjects in tragedy, and for the forms of the classic drama. The heroic couplet which they falsely led us to adopt in the theatre, when rhyming tragedies went out with the old government, was employed to a much wider extent than ever, as the vehicle of all subjects of an extensive character. It was also the aim of the French school to make up, for the lack of romance in their subjects, by polish and superior finish in the execution of their poems. This aim after perfection of style remained, when the muse once more reverted for topics to the storehouse of creation. These two features, viz. the employment of the heroic couplet and elaborate finish, with a due regard to the unities, constitute the principal features of the classic school, which sprang up after the settlement of our national liberties had imparted a bolder tone of thought to the muse of the country. Milton had himself furnished a splendid example of classical unity and symmetry of proportion, while the anti-Puritan reaction was at its height; but his merit was not acknowledged till that reaction expired under the new *régime*, when his works, doubtless, contributed to restore the national muse to the breezy lawns of the country, though shackled by such rules of art as spring from an adhesion to classic models. In Gray and Collins, French elegance of expression and classical correctness were combined with as much sublimity of imagination and genuine pathos as the lyric and elegiac forms admit of. Nature, however, had previously gained her ascendancy in Thomson, who may be regarded as

the bold reviver of the natural school of poetry, after nearly every trace of it had been obliterated by the tide of French innovation. Henceforward the two schools, each claiming for itself the same wide range of objects, were destined to act and react upon each other. In the first part of the eighteenth century the classical school ruled supreme. In the middle and latter part of the eighteenth century, the natural vindicated for itself a large share of the public esteem. But the ascendancy in point of popularity was with the classical. In Thomson, Cowper, and Burns, the natural culminated; in Dodsley it found its feeblest expositor. Goldsmith, Churchill, and Crabbe were the best cultivators of the classical school; Darwin and Hailey the worst.

The material school is closely allied with the classical, as the romantic with the natural. The philosophical is equally seen in conjunction with both. Davies is an example of the one, Akenside of the other. In Pope, the Gallico-classical school triumphed; in Milton, the Oriento-classical; in Shakespeare, the natural; in Spenser, the romantic. The natural school, depending more on the use of the Teutonic, than the Greek element in our language, ought, in combination with the romantic, to constitute our leading school of poetry. It is the only school in accordance with our national characteristics, our primitive traditions, and our historical associations. In the drama, it has generally been in the ascendant, unless during the fitful period of the Restoration, when the material school took the stage by storm. In other departments of poetry, down to the seventeenth century, the natural school stood without a rival. But during the last two centuries, its reign has been only intermittent. In the century which followed the Restoration, it lay, comparatively speaking, dead. But the natural school has awoken since with something of its pristine strength, and has at length managed to win back for itself a large portion of the public favour.

Schlegel divides the schools of poetry into the classical and romantic, taking the latter in a sense peculiar to himself, as the

school in which the spirit of Christian love predominates. Those poems which represent their heroes emerging from the conflict with evil, purified by the struggle, and raised, as it were, to a higher existence, as the "Prometheus" of Shelley, are romantic. Those, on the other hand, which represent their heroes succumbing in the strife, and descending into the gulf of darkness, with the precipitation of an Orestes, Macbeth, or a Faust, these are pre-eminently classical. Schlegel appears to have been led into this inversion of the ordinary meaning of these terms, by his theological prepossessions. Classical poetry sprung out of a state of society in which Christianity was not; it is, therefore, ethnic in scope and purpose. Romantic poetry sprung out of a state of society in which Christianity was the principal element: it is, therefore, evidently moral in its aim and conception.

Romantic poetry, however, has nothing to do with Christianity as a system, but only with the more variegated hues which it derived from Persian sources, and the fusion of Oriental with Gothic ideas which it threw into the heart of Europe. Hence, romantic poems are formed upon no regular models, but reflect in their features the bizarre and confused elements from which they spring. Classical poetry may be said to deify nature, romantic to embody spirit. The one divinizes the human, the other humanizes the divine. The one subordinates the spiritual to the material, the other the material to the spiritual element. Occasionally, however, there is a disparity between the subject selected and the manner of handling it. Blackmore chose a romantic subject, but his treatment of it was eminently classical. In the hands of Ariosto, classical subjects assume a romantic aspect; in the hands of Tasso, chivalrous and romantic subjects, a classical aspect. In our own Spenser, both romantic subject and the romantic treatment of it are eminently united. Goethe is romantic in "Faust" and "Goetz Berlichingen," but classical in "Tasso" and "Herman and Dorothea." Schiller is romantic in the "Robbers," but classical in his "Iphigeneia of

Tauris." But our dramatists, except in Court masques, are seldom classical, while the French are always so. Shakespeare is romantic in his "Midsummer Night's Dream," and Marlowe in "Faust." These authors, however, reverted to the natural style in "Julius Cæsar" and "Edward II." But, when the Elizabethan age expired, all taste for romantic poetry expired along with it. The spirit slept for three centuries, only to revive in the last age with keener force, and under new forms of existence.

The revolt of Gothic art against classical models, from which, in early times, romanticism sprung, was destined later to blend the term with the spirit of revolt, manifested in poetic conceptions, against existing institutions and all established authorities whatever. Modern romanticism, thus, became a sort of protest against medieval romanticism. The term both in Germany and Italy became identified, as regards all forms of art, with the most unfettered exercise of individual freedom. Christianity, which had largely impregnated the old romanticism with its visions of a posthumous world, was fated to be driven from its sphere by the new romanticism, which hungered after fresh theories of existence. The old sources of the supernatural were exhausted. The machinery seemed worn out. Men craved for something new. Hence, "Faust" and "Manfred" became the exponents of a school, which left the soul to construct out of the ruins of the past, by its own unaided intuitions, a new scheme of the supernatural entirely subversive of the modern framework of society. In despotic countries, the war against existing faiths and established modes of government, could only be carried on by an onslaught upon the literary outworks in which those forms of faith and government found expression. In this manner, the romanticism of the poet became not unfrequently a cloak for the disguise of the revolutionist. The new romanticism thus assumed a form in direct conflict with its former principles. The old romanticism was credulous, submissive, and devout. The new is sceptical, rebellious, and

profane. The modern offshoot has nothing in common with its parent except irregularity of lineaments and unproportional forms, while the animating spirit within is one of startling paradox, of withering satire, and of an unbridled license subversive of all authority. The old romanticism was lifted into the ascendant by the quiet revolution of events. The new romanticism seeks to enthrone itself by force and violence.

In the nineteenth century the old schools have been much broken up, or found in connection with new combinations. In Wordsworth, the natural school has been combined with the philosophic; in Southey, with the romantic element. Crabbe has identified realistic subjects with classical, Browning with natural and romantic treatment. Swinburne has divorced the material, from the conventional, school, and allied it with the natural. In Montgomery, classical treatment is combined with the religious element. In Longfellow, the natural is suffused with a tinge of the romantic. The poets of the nineteenth century have been as much distinguished by an eclecticism with regard to their styles, as its builders with regard to their architecture, or its philosophers with regard to their philosophy. Some of the leading poets have a peculiar style of their own, while those of the inferior classes have sought distinction by adopting a *mélange* so striking as to confound most of the schools which have preceded them. It is the peculiar weakness of the thought of the age not to know what it would be at, to set æsthetic and logical coherence at defiance, to override radical principles, and to imagine it has arrived at a satisfactory solution of conflicting views by blending their contrarieties into one system. Nowhere have these tendencies been so conspicuously displayed as in the poetic arena. It has, therefore, been, in some degree, necessary to group those poets, who depart from, or blend in their treatment, the old established divisions, by some leading feature, which their works have in common. In Tennyson and his imitators, who are chiefly of the feminine class, the principles of design largely predominate over those of nature. They may,

therefore, be correctly designated the art school. Montgomery and Longfellow are, in common, distinguished for the prominence they give to social life and the domestic affections. They, therefore, form a group apart. Shelley and Keats are equally distinguished for their poetic rendering of the old philosophy. They, therefore, fall into the same category. Swinburne more nearly approaches them than any other group. There is, however, this difference, that they devote themselves to the spiritual side of Greek pantheism, while Swinburne almost exclusively worships its material and sensuous aspects. No poets could be more dissimilar than Crabbe and Browning, but they are at one in discarding the fictitious element in poetry, and in confining themselves to the production of the actual. They, therefore, keep each other company. In the case of those writers who have, like Scott and Byron, treated their subjects conformably to the source from which they are derived, I have adopted the old classification, as it does not interfere with the division according to some distinguishing feature in their works. Poets, after all, are a very difficult class of people to place in order, and if Plato banished them from his "Republic," it might have been not so much on the ground of immorality, as out of resentment at their setting anything like philosophical arrangement at defiance.

But one of the strangest combinations of the century is the alliance of much of the turgid rant and inflated epithets which distinguished the dramatists of the Restoration, with the hybrid mixture of philosophy and religion which distinguishes the poets of our own age. The wild and unbridled use of the fancy has been, heretofore, accompanied with a similar licence in morality. But we have a bevy of poets who, in the rage for novelty, have allied quiet, staid topics of religious, and domestic sentimentality with a license of rant and bombast which is hardly paralleled by anything in Nathaniel Lee or Colley Cibber. Ambiguity and unmeaningness very much interfere with the merits of this class of writers, who endeavour to make up for

profound thought and intellectual unity in their works, by strong flashes of fancy and inflated forms of expression. It cannot be denied, however, that their poems contain many beauties, though these are not of such a class as to prevent the name of "spasmodic school" from being fairly applied to them.

Another class are those who, while living in town, affect a great love for the country—who are supposed to explode into raptures at the sight of a hedge of honeysuckle or a field of turnips. With these gentlemen, Pope and all the classical school of poets are at a sad discount. Hence Byron called them derisively the Cockney school of poets. Their taste, however, is good for what it accepts, and is only bad for what it repudiates. The question whether objects of wit are admissible themes for poetry has long since been decided against them. In the Bowles' controversy, Byron showed that a great poet might be a poor critic; but the discussion he started enabled Campbell to prevent the domain of English poetry from being narrowed by sectarian views, and to place its principles upon a catholic foundation.

CHAPTER VI.

GENERAL FEATURES OF THE LAKE SCHOOL.

THE eighteenth century went out amid the throes of social and political revolutions. America had gained her independence. France, after regenerating herself, was employed upon the singular mission of regenerating Europe. Everywhere, the rights of man were receiving a practical illustration, either from the pen of the theorist, the sword of the warrior, or the axe of the public executioner. All human institutions were shaken to their foundations. In political discussions, men ignored, if they did not repudiate, all past authority. The old system of society was crumbling into ruin, and there was a loud demand for new institutions, with broader and deeper foundations than those in which its medieval convictions had reposed. Poetry, among other things, experienced the levelling tendencies of the epoch. As the old rule of kings and priests, the pompous ceremonies of state, the gilded trappings of power were pushed aside as in conflict with the wants of an enlightened people, so in poetry, the tinsel decorations of Greek art, the purple robe and the nodding plume, with the whole storehouse of tropes, allegories, and personifications, were discarded for the expression of the genuine feelings of the heart and the affectionate sympathies of nature, which the stately trappings of the muse were supposed to impair, if not to extinguish. Society was recalled by the same ardent band of enthusiasts to its original laws, and poetry resolved into its primitive elements as they existed in the

human heart. Parnassus was to be purified from the false idols, and political government from the unjust principles, which tyranny or a perverted taste had introduced into their respective domains. Nor can it be denied that the one needed as much the pruning-knife of the reformer as the other. The French classical school, after culminating in Pope, and passing through various stages of senility in the works of Parnel and Blackmore, had reached its last gasp in the pages of Pye and Darwin. The Laureate's chair had been occupied by a succession of writers, whom to call poets in any sense of the term, would be a singular inversion of all that we understand by that name. Burns was left to pine in obscurity as a custom-house informer; Cowper, though more in the ascendant, was completely overshadowed by the imperial fame of Macpherson. The public mind not only required to be brought back to the plain masculine simplicity of the Elizabethan age, but to have its sympathies awakened for a new species of poetic excellence radically opposed to the expiring school which had absorbed all its appreciation.

The men who deemed themselves competent to undertake this task, were possessed of slender pecuniary, but large intellectual resources,—of scrupulous rectitude, of unstable political convictions, but of the most unflinching attachment to letters. Southey, Coleridge, and Lovell, the originators of the movement, in addition to the bond of congenial tastes and convictions, had married three sisters from Bristol, one a school-mistress, the other an actress, and the third a milliner, without any certain prospect in either case of providing for the pressing exigencies of wedded life. The result was a violent conflict with existing institutions, which they regarded as the cause of their own hardships; and a keen sympathy for the classes below them, whom a still severer fate had condemned to misery and disgrace. These writers subsequently fell in with Wordsworth, whose private means were as slender, and whose political sympathies were as ardent, as their own. Similarity of

tastes and feelings led to a warm friendship. This literary union, which began in Somerset, was further strengthened by the production of literary works in common. Southey and Coleridge wrote and published in Bristol, conjointly, a drama entitled "The Fall of Robespierre," a mushroom production which sprang up in a single night. In the same town, Wordsworth published, in conjunction with Coleridge, the "Lyrical Ballads," a work which nobody would buy, and the failure of which, each was amiable enough to attribute to his partner's wares, selecting those for censure which are indisputably the best parts of the work. To the "Lyrical Ballads" were prefixed elaborate prefaces by Wordsworth, explanatory of the new school of poetry, which the reviewers treated with derision. But these poets were alike undismayed by obloquy, and proof against neglect. Their love of nature being as unconquerable as their passion for letters, they abandoned Somerset, the scene of their early failures, and sought out an abiding home among the mountains of Cumberland. Hence, they obtained the name of the Lake School, an appellation which marks out similarity of tastes and convictions, as well as familiar relationship, rather than any common principles of poetic doctrines exemplified in their works.

There were, however, certain broad features which they agreed to recognize as constituting the essential elements of poetry. Nor were they inclined to show much mercy to any who chose to wander beyond the landmarks they had laid down. They pushed their antipathy to the French classical school of poetry to so great an extent as to exclude Pope and Dryden from the category of poets altogether. Subjects, or illustrations drawn from art, were, in their view, far inferior to those drawn from nature. They were united in the belief that the natural school, as illustrated by Chaucer and the Elizabethan poets, was the only genuine school of poetry which this country possesses, or of which it ought to be proud. They were also united in asserting that no poetry can be good, even in an æsthetic sense, which is

divorced from the moral principle, on the ground, I suppose, that no real pleasure, which it is the object of poetry to realize, can be conveyed by depicting the coarser passions, or by any representation which subjects the more delicate susceptibilities of man's nature to the domination of his animal propensities. The Lake poets placed the proper functions of poetry in illustrating the charities of human life, and humbling the pride of the intellect at the shrine of the affections, rather than in the delineation of overmastering energy, or in illustrating that Titanic force which conquers fate by indomitable will.

Of the blunter joys and passions of human life, they seem to have known nothing. Instead of plunging into the business of the world, and draining to the lees its pleasures and its sorrows, they held themselves aloof, cultivating the domestic virtues in seclusion, without any knowledge of social phenomena except through the casual reports of visitors, or the pale reflex of newspapers. Hence, as poets, they laboured under a double disadvantage. Excluded from the sphere of passion, they could only feel at home in reflective themes, in illustrating the domestic virtues, or in moralizing upon the vicissitudes of life, or in deriving from the appearances of nature lessons of wisdom, and materials for the display of their imaginative powers. Their knowledge of human affairs became proportionally contracted, as they were shut out from the world of practical experience. When, therefore, in their verse they ventured upon philosophical speculation, they were at the mercy of abstract theories, arising out of a very imperfect acquaintance with the facts to which those theories applied. They were, in reality, incompetent to deal with the world of passion; and, in the sphere of reflection, narrow prejudices interfered to deprive their loftiest thoughts of the value they would otherwise have possessed. The sincerity of the Lake poets, in abandoning opinions much in advance of their age, for others of an equally retrogressive tendency, has been often called in question. But the French Revolution, beginning

with bright omens for the happiness of the human family, only to have its fair dawn overshadowed by storms of violence and bloodshed, may palliate, if it does not entirely account for, the revulsion of political feeling which marked the outset of their career. It is, however, to be regretted that the change from the extreme of Republicanism to the extreme of Toryism, was made at the time when their private fortunes were undergoing considerable renovation. When a man betters his condition by changing his opinions, some doubt generally arises as to the purity of his motives, especially when his new opinions can claim few solid reasons in their favour. Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, without a sixpence, advocating Radical institutions, and Southey laureate, Wordsworth distributor of stamps, Coleridge secretary to the Governor of Malta, advocating the most ultra doctrines in Church and State of the old Tory school, cannot be said to afford no ground for suspicion. But all extreme opinions are only too liable to generate their opposites in fervid minds, who are in nowise apt to base their convictions upon the reasoning principle. And it seems quite natural that, as the first set of opinions were maintained with all the rashness of zeal, the other should have been upheld with all the fervour of intolerance. But the question of sincerity, however much it may touch their characters as men, can have little bearing upon their position as poets. Pope, in the controversy upon his poetic merits, was trounced for his peccadilloes with Martha Blount, and his inconstancy to Stewart Wortley,—just as if one sin the more, or one virtue the less, could possibly affect his place in the ranks of Parnassus. Had the opinions of the Lake poets been taken up merely out of selfish interest to serve a party, they hardly would have made them the staple material of works intended for posterity. But these gentlemen are in the unfortunate position, that their candour cannot be defended except at the cost of their intellect. As they introduced these opinions in their poems, the philosophical narrowness or

unsoundness of such opinions, becomes an element in the appreciation of their productions as works of art. That such opinions excluded them from a catholic sympathy with the human race, that they interposed human formulas of belief which overshadowed to them the spiritual phenomena of the universe, that they introduced conflicting elements in their views, that they narrowed the poetical boundaries of their conceptions, that they caused them to link the domestic sympathies with a hybrid philosophy, and to sacrifice to prejudice those talents which ought to have been employed in unriveting its fetters,—all these, and much more, hindered them from attaining that lofty eminence in their art which they vainly imagined would be conceded to them by posterity.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAKE POETS.

Wordsworth.

IT may serve to bring out a salient point of distinction between Wordsworth and those of his predecessors in the natural school, to observe that, while their poles of thought are objective, his is mostly subjective. Cowper and Thomson mostly select for description those objects which strike the spectator with natural beauty or grandeur, and which enable them to produce corresponding impressions in the minds of their readers. Wordsworth, on the other hand, selects such as are mean and trivial, in order that the attractiveness of his pictures may be entirely owing to the ideal atmosphere with which he has invested them. His manner of transforming a withered thorn, a miry pool, or leafless oak into objects of profound interest, shows how little his creations owe to the external subject, and how much to the gorgeous colouring of his own mind. If his fancy sports with flowers, it is not the frail beauties of the garden, but the daisy and celandine that are the objects of his adoration. The meanest product of nature has links which connect it with the infinite. It is in revealing these links that his imagination imparts the charm of novelty to the most familiar scenes. To him,

The bare trees, the mountains bare,
The grass in the green fields,

impart a sense of joy, as if their principle of life beat in mysterious sympathy with that of his own nature. As the meanest objects are invested with wonder, so the most material become instinct with spirit and intelligence. A bald stone upon an eminence seems to him a huge sea-beast crawled forth to sun itself. A tall rock piercing the clouds wears on its crest the appearance of an imperial castle which ruin cannot touch. Wordsworth's mind expands with the greatness of his subject, until the loftiest derive fresh grandeur from its majesty or depth. Skiddaw, clothed with his thoughts, strikes us with greater force than when surveyed in its naked reality; and Helvellyn acquires a grandeur from his conceptions which it fails to derive even from the magnifying influences of cloud and tempest. Even the moral feelings of the poet become identified with the scenes he describes. The flower shrinks from the gaze with the shyness of his nature, the cliff lifts its head with the uprightness of his spirit, and the lake imbibes from his purity a crystalline clearness which is not its own.

Had Wordsworth displayed the same comprehensiveness in dealing with man as with nature, his genius would not have been so long ignored. But in the human sphere, he was hampered by theories which cut him off from genuine sympathy with the largest section of humanity. Mont Blanc and Lake Lemani he could appreciate as much as any man; but foreign manners or institutions he could never understand. Even in his own country, his sympathies were bound up with a trifling fragment of the population. Wordsworth, though a Tory, turned his back upon the great conservative classes of society, as unworthy of his attention. His heart only beat in unison with the rustic poor, with the poor who had no radical leanings, with the poor who regarded the village parson as a sort of tutelary divinity in this lower world. What are called respectable people, Wordsworth scrupulously avoids. He is only at home when he falls in with a vagrant pedlar, an idiot boy, or a ragged shepherd. With a perfumed haunter of clubs, or, indeed,

with any gloved person, he will hold no converse whatever. The upper ten thousand were to Wordsworth poetically worthless; for he imagined that the feelings of the heart were never found in their maturity except in the huts of hinds and society of peasants. There was, however, some object in this exclusiveness. It would appear that Wordsworth designed, by the instrumentality of the lowest ranks of society, to erect a poetic temple, at the shrine of which the most selfish hearts should be humanized, and a feeling of love kept alive, reciprocating and reciprocated, between the rich and the poor, the politically great and the socially defenceless, for ever.

Life is the vital energy of love ;

and as long as the two extremes of society stood looking at each other with feelings of repulsion, the end of existence could not be realised. His verse was to become the medium of identifying the loftiest purposes of his art with the purest aims of Christianity.

His theory of the poetic art seems to have fitted in to this view. No language could be poetical which was factitious or conventional. The muse must wear a russet robe, and speak in the plainest style. Her vocabulary must be that of which lettered halls and academies take no account. No other language but that used by vagrants and peasants could express the genuine sentiments of the heart. The lower, therefore, you descend in the social scale, the fitter subjects you find for poetry. His hatred to the Pope school, doubtless, contributed largely to this result. He appears to have taken the Queen Anne poets as embodying every feature which he ought most studiously to avoid. Their civic life he repudiates for the society of pedlars; their drawing-room conventionalities, for the manners of the farm and the cottage; their turgid epithets, for the language of simplicity; their phosphorescent display of sparkling wit, for the domination of the affections and the human charities; their lavish delineation of external objects, for the inner laws of the spiritual universe, and the deep soundings of the infinite

mind. Hence he sweeps away with boundless contempt the decorative pomp of verse, all the jargon of mythological allusion, all the machinery of tropes and figures, as things which had defiled the sacred temple of poetry, in whose aisles nothing should be heard but the pure voice of the human heart, recording its own joys and sorrows, or communing with the mysteries of the universe. But man in the upper classes is the creature of conventions. It is only in the lower, that he moves under the spontaneous influence of his feelings, or obeys the voice of nature. He, therefore, felt himself restricted to select his heroes from the humblest types of humanity. But vagrants and pedlars belong to a low walk of art, and assuming that Wordsworth surrounds these subjects with all the atmosphere of poetic inspiration, this would not by any means lift him to the loftiest rank in poetry. The Eve of Milton, the Una of Spenser, or the Haidée of Byron, belongs to a far higher school of poetic creation than Ellen, Ruth, or Martha Ray, just as the Venus of Titian is a far higher creation of genius than any dairy-maid in the farmsteads of Moreland, or any Flemish weaver's mistress in the rustic revels of Teniers. The exclusiveness of Wordsworth's theory is founded on the limitations of his own powers. He was incompetent to reproduce human nature in the broad phase of sensuous joyousness, in any class. He, therefore, held it wrong to divorce poetry from the ethical principle. But the higher products of civilization, the refined and æsthetic, who have hearts beating beneath their bosoms even more sensitive than those of any drunken waggoner or distressed sempstress,—these, he declared, could afford us few instances of genuine feeling, because he was unable to describe the workings of the affections in combination with refined manners, or delicate breeding. The sensuous phases or the lofty turbulence of passion in any grade of society he could not describe at all, or, at least, if he could, he never attempted it.

Wordsworth's exclusion from the tempestuous regions of the soul confines him to the reflective element. He is a philo-

sophical poet, or he is nothing. Even his smallest pieces are written to illustrate some mental phenomenon, or to unveil some striking analogy between the natural and the moral world. His great poem, "The Excursion," was designed to propound his views on man, nature, and society. But what those views were, he never condescends to tell us, in any of his numerous prefaces, but leaves us to pick them up as well as we can from his poems. He does, however, inform us that the "Prelude," which contains a history of the growth of his own powers, may be considered as an ante-chapel to his great Gothic cathedral, "The Excursion," and all his shorter pieces little shrines or recesses which fit into the same grand structure. But this merely suggests systematic unity of design, without throwing any light upon its purpose. Now this grand unity of design can be nowhere traced in its works. There are certain isolated principles scattered up and down his pages, but no attempt to concatenate these principles, so as to mark out their mutual relationship, or to form them into a grand system of philosophic truth. The absence of such a pervading unity, with the conflicting principles it embodies, is the great blemish of "The Excursion."

This poem purports to treat of man in his multiform relations to nature and society. As such, the subject-matter was not different from that which Pope had already handled a century before. The only two philosophical poems of first class merit which had come down to the nineteenth century were the great poem of "Lucretius," and Pope's celebrated essay. Both were characterised by admirable unity of sentiment, precision of reasoning, and accuracy of thought. The parts are skilfully dovetailed into each other, blending multiform variety of design with classical unity of purpose. But there is an entire absence of these features in "The Excursion." Instead of unity there is dissonance; for precision there is vagueness; for accuracy, confusion of thought. It cannot be stated that Wordsworth's theme was too general for minute philosophical discrimination. The subject-matter the poet proposes to treat of, is the very same Pope

laid out for himself in the "Essay on Man." Wordsworth embodies his views far more poetically than his predecessor, in a fictitious narrative; whereas Pope abandoned the concrete form, for abstract principles. But the opposite manner of treatment does not constitute the difference. The fact is, Pope thought out his subject before committing it to verse; while Wordsworth never manipulated his ideas with a view to secure coherency of design, but went on sounding his way, guided by two conflicting charts, which led him through all the mazes of inconsistency.

If there is one feature more predominant than another in Wordsworth's poetry, it is the feeling of a silent interchange of sympathy between man and the various forms of inanimate nature. For him,

The meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

It seems a fundamental belief with Wordsworth, that every phase of inorganic existence is endued with certain spiritual properties corresponding to its rank in creation, of which, as man is the highest organic being, the human soul is the highest expression. He does not shrink from informing us that—

It is his faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

And his opinion of a dull, carnal-minded man, who has no eye to the hidden mysteries of the material universe, is expressed in "Peter Bell"—

A primrosé by the river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him—
And it was nothing more.

The poet cannot encounter in his walk a bed of daffodils fluctuating in the breeze, without describing them as

Outvying the waves in glee.

And in a nutting expedition he feels a sense of pain from having violated the quiet of the woods :—

Then up I rose,
And dragged to earth both branch and bough with crash,
And merciless ravage ; and the shady nook
Of hazels, and the green and mossy bower,
Deformed and sullied, patiently gave up
Their quiet being : and unless I now
Confound my present feelings with the past,
Even then, when from the bower I turned away
Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings,
I felt a sense of pain when I beheld
The silent trees and the intruding sky ;—
Then, dearest maiden, move along these shades
In gentleness of heart ; with gentle hand
Touch—for there is a spirit in the woods.*

In his youth, the poet says—

The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion. The tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood—
Their colours and their forms—were then to me
An appetite : a feeling and a love
That had no need of a remoter chasm,
By thought supplied.

But, later on, this feeling assumed the shape of a moral principle :—

For I have learned
To look on nature—not as in the time
Of thoughtless youth ; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Not hoarse nor grating, though of awful power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts : a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,

* Nutting.

And the round ocean, and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man
 A motion and a spirit that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things. Therefore, am I still
 A lover of the mountains and the woods,
 Well pleased to recognise
 In nature and the language of the sense,
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
 The guide, the guardian of my heart and soul—
 Of all my moral being.

Early, says Wordsworth, the Wanderer had learnt to reverence the Bible—

But in the mountains did he feel his faith,
 Responsive to the writing; all things there
 Breathed immortality—revolving life
 And greatness still revolving. Infinite
 There, littleness was not; the least of things
 Seemed infinite; and there his spirit shaped
 Her prospects.*

* * * * *

What soul was his, when from the naked top
 Of some bold headland, he beheld the sun
 Rise up and bathe the world in light! He looked,—
 Ocean and earth—the solid frame of earth
 And ocean's liquid mass, beneath him lay
 In gladness and deep joy. The clouds were touched,
 And in their silent faces did he read
 Unutterable love. Sound needed none,
 Nor any voice of joy; his spirit drank
 The spectacle. Sensation, soul, and form
 All melted into him; they swallowed up
 His animal being. In them did he live,
 And by them did he live—they were his life.†

It was a theory of Malebranche, that we view nature in God. But the doctrine, which Wordsworth appears almost unconsciously to have espoused, views God in nature. But the most

* "Excursion," Book First.

† *Ibid.*

glorious manifestation of nature is the human mind. All the divine intelligences with which religion has peopled heaven, or the countless hosts of misshapen fiends which are represented as crowding the lowest pit of Erebus, these the poet views as mere phantoms, which he passes unterrified,—

All strength, all terror, single or in bands,
That ever was put forth in personal form,
Jehovah with his thunder, and the choir
Of ministering angels, and the empyreal thrones,
I pass them unalarmed.

The poet reserves all his fear and awe for the mind of man,

To which the heaven of heavens is but a veil.

That Wordsworth's views, even as to the orthodox sense of the account of the fall in Genesis, were by no means fixed, is evident from a passage parenthetically thrown into the text of "The Excursion :"—

From these pure heights
(Whether of actual vision, sensible
To sight and feeling, or that in this sort
Have condescendingly been shadow'd forth
Communications spiritually maintained
And intuitions moral and divine)
Fell human kind.

This allusion to the worship of the Jews is followed by a description of the origin of the worship of the Egyptian, the Persian, and the Greek. Now the common principle running throughout all these details is, that these various worships owe their birth to the reverence which nature has inspired in the breasts of different races, who gave their spiritual intuitions various external embodiments, according to the constitution of their minds. The Jews see, or think they see, angels on their mountain tops. They hear, or think they hear, Jehovah's voice in the thunder or the wind. The Greeks beheld sporting

oreads in the fleeting sunbeams, and naiads in the rills. The Egyptians beheld in the spangled dome of the sky the residence of Belus, and built towers, on the top of which they erected magnificent shrines for his repose. The Persians beheld in the sun earth's universal Lord, and on the peaks of mountains worshipped Him with sacrifices and with hymns. If the difference between these faiths is a matter of mere moral or spiritual intuition, the only distinction between the worship of the Jews and their neighbours is, that both adored the same invisible power, only under different external manifestations. Even the poet imagines there is a moral sympathy in nature akin to the moral feeling in man, which is outraged by the wanton violation of moral laws, as in the language of Milton, which he cites as an illustration of the principle :—

Earth trembled from her entrails, as again
In pangs, and nature gave a second groan :
Sky lowered, and muttering thunder, some sad drops
Wept at completion of the mortal sin.

The external universe is a temple, of which our poet represents himself as the priest. The wicked at her shrine may have their hearts purified. No one can habitually contemplate natural scenery with a loving spirit, without feeling a shower of holy influences sanctifying his mind. Hence, with Wordsworth, this cultivation of nature assumes the appearance of a religion. It is a source of the purest joy—the fount of perpetual and ever-enduring pleasures. The worldly spirit of prudence which tends to neutralize this passion for nature within us, he reprobates to so great an extent, as to prefer the Greek mythology for his creed without the modern system of barter, than any other religion with it :—

The world is too much with us ; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers ;
Little we see in nature that is ours.
We have thrown our hearts away, a sordid boon !
This sea that bares her bosom to the moon,

The winds that will be howling at all hours,
 But now are folded up like sleeping flowers,—
 With each and all of these we're out of tune.
 It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
 A pagan suckled in a creed outworn,
 So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
 Have glimpses which would make me less forlorn,
 Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,
 Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

For, in truth, philosophically speaking, there is not much difference between the ancient and modern worshipper of nature. Both in substance believed in a pervading soul, throwing out external manifestations of beauty. They only differ about the name and the personification of the power. But this difference did not make one less than the other a devotee at the shrine of material spiritualism. The poet even tells us that he beat the Greek, in the keen appreciation of the spirit which haunted his visions, and which he most worshipped:—

Beauty, a living presence of the earth,
 Surpassing the most fair ideal forms,
 Which craft of delicate spirits had composed
 From earth's materials, waits upon my steps,
 Pitches her tents before me as I move,
 An hourly neighbour—Paradise and groves
 Elysian, fortunate fields—like those of old
 Sought in the Atlantic main; why should they be
 A history only of departed things?
 Or a mere fiction of what never was?
 For the discerning intellect of man,
 When wedded to this goodly universe,
 In love and holy passion, shall find these
 A simple produce of the common day.

This deification of the powers of nature; this attempt to purify the grosser feelings by communing with lake and mountain; this belief that Paradise and the Elysian fields were abstract conceptions of the same keen insight into the spiritual

harmonies of the universe, and were not only not dead but might exist for ever, enjoyable and enjoyed upon this earth of ours ; this effort to break down the antithesis between mind and matter, and show that they are both only different conceptions of the same substance ; I am at a loss to conceive how these things can be reconciled, I will not say with the Thirty-nine Articles, but with the essential constituents of the Christian faith. The belief in the perfectibility of human nature, or its paradisaical felicity on this earth, is utterly at war with the doctrine of the fall. The Church, also, claims as its special prerogative the purification of the heart. It would exclude from its bosom as an idolater the man who should worship nature, or declare that the pageantry of the universe constituted the life, the very nutriment of his spiritual being. Yet this language is held of, and by, a character in whose mouth the poet places sentiments which show that—

Though a heathen in the spiritual part,
He was a right good Christian at the heart.

And the poet does not leave him alone as the exponent of the hybrid mixture of the pantheism of Pythagoras with the doctrines of Christ, but he represents him as calling in a village clergyman to assist him in the task. This gentleman is in his natural position, when he descants upon the fortunes of the more romantic of his parishioners, whose graves lie at his feet ; but when he is made to endorse the poet's pantheism, and to wind up a poem, whose grand feature is the investiture of the love of nature with the functions of religion, by a conventicle harangue, wherein all the benefits which many people aver ecclesiastical institutions in this country have striven to prevent, are ascribed to their influence, then the poet has succeeded in placing the kerb-stone to the contrarieties which pervade his work, and leaves his readers with very conflicting ideas as to the main scope and object of his poem. The fact is, Wordsworth was both a Chartist and a Tory, a Pantheist as well as a

Churchman : it is, therefore, not surprising that the work into which he flung all his energies should reflect the contrarieties of his mind.

This system of viewing the domestic affections and emotional sympathies, to the exclusion of the intellect, as vehicles of inspiration, appears to have led Wordsworth to the notion that the Deity holds more intimate communication with childhood, when the reason is dead and the feelings paramount, than with any other phase of existence. This creed he has developed in an ode which will last as long as the English language. Here, he says, among other things—

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting :
 The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
 Hath had elsewhere its setting,
 And cometh from afar ;
 Not in entire forgetfulness,
 And not in utter nakedness,
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come
 From God, who is our home :
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy !
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close
 Upon the growing boy :
 But he beholds the light, and whence it flows.
 He sees it in his joy,
 The youth who daily farther from the east
 Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
 And by the vision splendid
 Is on his way attended.
 At length the man perceives it die away,
 And fade into the light of common day.

And again, in "The Excursion :"—

Thou who didst wrap the cloud
 Of infancy around us, that Thyself,
 Therein, with our simplicity awhile
 Might'st hold, on earth, communion undisturbed.*

This opinion of Wordsworth, so grandly expounded, would

* "Excursion," Book Fourth.

seem to derive some confirmation from Comte's theory that the stage of infancy, like that of the youth of the world, is dominated by the theological element. In childhood, everything presents the appearance of the marvellous. We imagine ourselves in direct intercourse with invisible spirits, that angels or demons lurk in every corner, that heaven lies about our housetops. But Comte regarded these impressions as naked delusions—mere infantine dreams, and nothing more ; whereas the poet clings to them as substantial realities, though this belief stands out in glaring contradiction to those Pantheistic views he so earnestly embodies in other portions of his works. This theory is, also, as much in conflict with scientific views, on the one hand, as with theological notions on the other. If the soul of man be but a higher organization of the same element which pervades the inorganic world, how can it be said to flow directly out of heaven? We are informed by the theologians upon whom our poet relied, that the soul is cut off from all communication with the Deity, from birth upwards, until the baptismal rite has been performed ; and if this be neglected, as it is in the great majority of the human race, childhood is passed in more or less subservience to the devil. But I am not aware that the affections and emotional sympathies are weaker in unbaptised infants than with others. This view, which alone derives support, in a religious sense, from the innocence and guilelessness of children, and from Christ's predilection for their society, hardly forms a consistent basis for a theory, which cuts up the doctrine of the Fall by the roots, and which makes every step in intellectual expansion a further remove from the influence of the Deity. Take the theory by itself, without any reference to the writer's doctrinal opinions, and it is specious enough ; but fit it as a "little shrine" into a Gothic church or pantheistic temple, and it becomes as utterly incongruous as a baptismal font in a Mohammedan mosque. It is this miscellaneous blending of conflicting views, which so largely detracts from the merits of Wordsworth's great poem. Detached portions of the piece are

splendidly elaborated, and, viewed singly, powerfully impress the imagination. It is only when we link the incongruous assemblage together that we are startled at the conflicting elements—at the jargon of systems presented to us, in the same piece of workmanship, as an instance of harmonious design and unity of purpose. This strange medley of contrary principles was not only at war with Wordsworth's religious opinions, but with the views of everybody else. And when a philosophical poet adopts theories which are contradictory in themselves, and, in their collective embodiment, at war with everybody else's notions on the same subject, he falls into a mistake similar to that of the representative poet who introduces into his work false manners and unnatural sentiments ; for, reason is violated in the one case, quite as much as nature in the other. Yet, despite of these great drawbacks, so preeminent are the beauties of the piece in their individual aspects, and so obtuse the national mind to mere philosophic inconsistencies, that "The Excursion" seems destined to hold its place as one of the first didactic poems in the English language.

Wordsworth embodies so much discursive description in his great poem, illustrates so many chance topics, uninformed with any idea of unity, as to bring the "Task" nearer to it than any other poem in our literature. But the "Task," which most nearly approaches it in tone, lacks design, and therefore cannot be said to come within the range of didactic poetry at all ; while the "Essay on Man," which resembles it in design, fails in imaginative embodiment and poetic execution. Pope uses verse as the vehicle of reason. In his "Essay," he seldom touches the emotional sensibilities. His appeals are always to the intellect. The imaginative faculty is only incidentally called in to illustrate argument, and never to awaken sympathy. The whole piece is a discussion upon abstract ethics. With Wordsworth, the heart is much more engaged than the head. He does not strive so much to convince the intellect as to enlist the sympathies. Purity of feeling, moral worth, lofty

emotion, and delicate sensibility, if he can win these to his side, he readily abandons to others' dialectic skill, as something extraneous to the vocation of the poet. Cowper, though he addresses himself far more to the general elements of our nature than Pope, dilates upon every casual subject which falls in his way. He has no aim except to blend morality with his multifarious descriptions of external nature. His reflections, as those of Wordsworth, seem called forth by every random object, like the tones of a lyre whose strings are abandoned to the passing gale. Cowper, however, never touches the heart with pity, or ever attempts to spiritualize nature till it assumes the form of ideal existence. But Wordsworth, while thoroughly human, rises completely out of the common-place sphere. The mind, purified from its grosser feelings by keen sympathy with the lowest forms of suffering, is carried by him to ethereal heights, where nature, glowing with the sun-bursts of Claude, seems endued with a spirituality diviner than that of man. The essence of nature is viewed as the outward manifestation of the power of which the soul is the interior image. Between both there is mutual kinship, each drawing from the other that which it most wants, until by the blending of spiritual effulgence with material pomp of imagery, both are incorporated into one dream of ideal existence. The functions of the Greek drama with modern dramatic incidents are thus united to a philosophy which glasses the divine perfections in the universe as in a mirror, and infatuates the soul so much with their beauty as to incline it to mistake the shadow for the reality.

But the exclusion of the higher types of humanity from his pages, the absence of any attempt to depict the deeper phases of passion, or to vitalize the human energies in connection with the lofty themes of war or ambition, or to illumine the darker shades of existence by the soft emotions of love, must keep Wordsworth from occupying so high a position as those who have shown themselves competent to shine in these subjects, and whose muse has ranged at will through all the regions

capable of interesting the heart of man. Hence, Wordsworth must be placed below Pope and even Byron, from the fact that though supreme in the didactic poem, he lacks the faculty, which they possessed in an uncommon degree, of storming the breast-works of the heart, by the embodiment of all the phases of passion. In the delineation of character, in the framing of incident, and in the constructive power of impregnating disjointed materials with one common life, he is likewise lamentably deficient. He is also too fond of forcing his individual feelings upon the reader, instead of entering fully into the feelings of others. These negative qualities must exclude Wordsworth from a foremost place in the second rank. But he is entitled to as high a position in it as supreme excellence in the reflective faculty, profound pathos, and ideal delineation of natural objects can place him. For he has bound man closer to nature by a thousand links of association and feeling, and intertwined the meanest objects of creation with the fibres of the human heart. In this respect he may be said to have placed in our hands a new fulcrum for the elevation of humanity. For the universe becomes in his verse a temple, through the portals of which man is ushered into the presence of the divinity. It is this interfusion of nature and the human soul in the substance of a higher spiritual being, that enables him to hallow the commonest events with a feeling of the infinite, to move, as it were, in an atmosphere of sublimity by illustrating the splendid analogues which bind man with the universe, and merge both in the existence of God himself.

Coleridge.

WORDSWORTH appears to have derived much of his material spiritualism from Coleridge, as Byron subsequently did from Shelley. The two poets who narrowly escaped each other at Cambridge* were thrown much together in later life, and there can be little doubt that the philosophy of Schelling, which Coleridge had mastered in Germany, was made to cast its glittering veil over the thoughts of his companion. Of Coleridge's admiration for Wordsworth, the *Biographia Literaria* is evidence, one half of which is taken up with a panegyric of his works. Of Wordsworth's admiration for Coleridge, the noble passage in the sixth book of the "Prelude" is no less conclusive, which also shows to what extent his companion's dreamy speculations had haunted the writer's mind :—

Of rivers, fields,
And groves I speak to thee, my friend, to thee
Who yet a liveried schoolboy in the depths
Of the huge city, on the leaded roof
Of that wide edifice, thy school's home,
Wert used to lie and gaze upon the clouds
Moving in heaven ; or of that pleasure tired,
To shut thine eyes, and by internal light
See trees and meadows, and thy native stream
Far distant, thus beheld from year to year
Of a long tribe.

I have thought

* See Wordsworth's "Prelude," b. vi.

Of thee, thy learning, gorgeous eloquence,
And all the strength and plumage of thy youth,
Thy subtle speculations, toils abstruse
Among the schoolmen, and Platonic forms
Of wild ideal pageantry, shaped out
From things well matched or ill, and words for things,
The self-created sustenance of a mind
Debarred from Nature's living images,
Compelled to be a life unto herself,
And unrelentingly progressed by thirst
Of greatness, love, and beauty.

The two companions supplemented each other's verses. They interchanged suggestions. They published poetry in common; and Coleridge, even more than Wordsworth, viewed the different appearances of nature as so many modifications of the everlasting mind:—

It were a vain endeavour,
Though I should gaze for ever
On that fair light that lingers in the west;
I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life whose fountains are within.
O Lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does nature live;
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud.*

Coleridge, however, repudiated Wordsworth's views respecting the baldness of poetic language, and the confining the region of the muse to the hamlet and the smithy. He even soared beyond the sphere of reflection into the higher one of passion, but into passion so etherealized that it may be fairly called the metaphysics of love. There is no voluptuousness, no swoonings on the breast of his beloved, no absorption of the animal functions in the imperious desires awakened by incarnate loveliness, but at best a dreaming reverie, a melancholy spirituality, with moonlight as a background, projecting in front the pale shadows of a coy lover and a bashful mistress.

* Ode to Dejection.

Such are his pictures of Geneviève and Christabel—creations which, though of the highest spiritual beauty, seem rather the product of an ethereal fancy refined by abstract theories than the genuine flesh and blood embodiments of our earth. In fact, the ethical views which Coleridge and Wordsworth had intruded into the sphere of art, however suited to the delineation of nature, were quite out of place in the representation of human feelings and passions. The advantage, therefore, which Coleridge had over Wordsworth in a wider range of subject, he did not turn to much account, while he falls infinitely below him in developing the many-sided relations of nature to humanity. In contrasting, however, the two men, it is not fair to overlook their widely different positions. Fortune made for the one munificent provision, and gave him health to enjoy it, while poverty and disease continued, like avenging furies, to buffet Coleridge, and drove him a homeless wanderer over the earth. It was, therefore, quite natural that the one should concentrate his mind upon a series of lofty efforts, while the other should only, as it were, take up his harp when the fit was on him, to abandon it when the first glow of heat had subsided, or the struggle for existence called him away. Yet in the fragments he has left, he has shown greater representative power in dealing with human incident than Wordsworth. He also excels him in the embodiment of character and in lyrical sweetness; but in genuine simplicity, deep pathos, and the ideal delineation of nature, he is so inferior to Wordsworth that the points in which he stands above him are lost sight of altogether.

It must, however, be allowed that there was that desultoriness in the mind of Coleridge, that disposition to grasp at everything and really master nothing, that love for bewildering digressions, that fluctuation of resolve, inconstancy of purpose in all he undertook, which would have been fatal to pre-eminent success in any branch of art, even had Coleridge been, what assuredly he was not, the spoilt child of Fortune.

No sooner had he broken into one subject than it was laid down for another. If one day he was toiling in the labyrinth of German metaphysics, the next he was sure to be buried in astrological lore, or in speculations about the millennium, which were in turn destined to be pushed aside for some abstruse theories about Shakespeare's relations to art. There was the same inconstancy in his convictions as in his pursuits, for Coleridge was always the victim of the reigning impression dominating his mind. By turns he became a visionary republican, a practical socialist, a dreaming theosophist, an inveterate Tory. For the conventicle he gave up the church, and abandoned both for Spinozism, only to come round to the church again. In such a fluctuating region there was no fixed strata in which the offshoots of poetry could take firm root; for ideas require time to ripen like everything else. Nor will artistic genius ever come to maturity if its productions have to be unceasingly plucked up and planted in new soil, or developed under opposing contrarieties of belief. The imagination of a man who changes his convictions with each revolving moon can never be fired, or his conceptions struck out, with that heat which is necessary for the production of grand and striking impressions. These, fixity and earnestness of thought can alone supply. It would have been as reasonable to expect umbrageous oaks to spring up out of a strata of shifting sand as great works from a mind so changeable and fluctuating as Coleridge's.

This uncertainty of tenure in the poet's intellectual domain, combined with his love for abstract speculation, make his creations seem but the reflex of the broken and disjointed efforts of his life. Nothing is complete; all is fragmentary and unreal, having little relation with the outside world, and wanting that coloured variety of woof and warp which destiny had blended in the web of his career. Few pass through so many strange phases of existence as Coleridge,—collegian, soldier, dramatic lecturer, moralist, newspaper scribe, preacher, Colonial Secre-

tary, habitual tourist, and metaphysician. Had one tithe of his experiences in these varied characters been reproduced in his poems, they would have presented a charming diversity of aspect. But the airy abstractions in which he indulged, and the narcotic which he swallowed as an antidote to bodily infirmities, threw over all his pieces the same silken veil of dreamy sentimentality. Hence there is little of the ring of actual life in his poems. We wander in his pages through a hall of magnificent torsos as if by moonlight, but the sense of beauty with which they haunt us is dimmed with the regret that the sculptor did not finish his statues, and bring them out on their pedestals into actual day. "Christabel" contains more genuine poetry, as far as it goes, than anything of the same kind in Scott or Wordsworth. But there it lies, tantalizing us with conjectures which its creator could not solve in any way satisfactory to himself. He therefore left the mystery unexplained to exercise the ingenuity of critics. In the "Dark Ladie," "Geneviève," "The Three Graves," "Kubla Khan," the "Wanderings of Cain," and "Hymn to the Earth," we find the same fragmentary and visionary treatment. It is hard to believe that one who can execute so well the little he attempts, could not complete the intellectual feast to which he invites us; but where we are so systematically compelled to content ourselves with fragments, the conclusion is forced upon us of the incompetency of the host to provide a regular entertainment.

If I were asked to individualize the character of Coleridge's poetry, I should place its distinctive feature in bringing into prominence the relations of man with the spiritual universe. Wordsworth merges man into nature, Coleridge nature into man. The material world in his verses is either lost sight of, or refined away until the spiritual peers through its shell like the moon through a cloud, deriving fresh lustre from illumining the gauze-like vapours which vainly strive to hide its light from earth. In this branch of his art, the "Ancient Mariner" is unrivalled. The punishment of man's thoughtlessness in dis-

lodging a spirit by shooting the alabatross, the spectre bark and its two skeleton inmates dicing for the possession of the culprit, the conversation of the weird powers over the vessel impelled onward by invisible agency, the reanimation of the dead bodies of the sailors by an angelic troupe, who cast them off again to reassume their own bright forms,—all these project the spiritual world so prominently in the foreground as to make the material seem nothing but its fluctuating shadow. Again, in “Christabel,” we have the substance of a tale representing a lady suffering for the faults of her lover, who is restored to peace by the pains so vicariously endured. But a spirit, in the person of Geraldine, was designed as the instrument of the change, through whom, as a flood-gate, the light of the spiritual universe was to stream on material creation. There is something very weird-like and novel in the path Coleridge thus struck out for himself; but to make efforts of this kind powerfully impress the imagination, they must not only be complete in themselves, but definitely connected with the real world. Coleridge’s poems, however, from his failure in these two particulars, frequently assume the appearance of dreams. His whole life appears to have been a hunt after material shadows. It is only when he draws creatures from the clouds that he gets among realities.

Apart from this disposition to sink the material in the spiritual, there is nothing in the poetry of Coleridge that would characterise a writer of pre-eminent rank in those departments which he selected for the exercise of his skill. His muse is rather tender and sweet than pathetic and grand. Fancy in him struggles with imagination for mastery; but his imagination generally embodies the beautiful, and seldom the sublime. It is rarely informed with lofty images, or fired by splendid passion. We are always charmed with its strokes, but never absolutely carried off our feet. The music is perfect, the imagery is striking, and the execution as far as it goes leaves little on the score of harmony to be desired; but deep pathos,

or startling contrasts, or any whirlwind of emotion, or rapid gusts of feeling, or a quick succession of bold figures, or completeness of conception arising spontaneously out of the structural unity of parts, we look for in vain. Hence, his success in the ode I should hardly call first-rate. And he cuts by no means so good a figure in the drama as he does in the ode. Few only of his fugitive pieces are of a high order of merit; but even were they all so, these would not, from the contemplative element which abounds in them, place him in the front rank. It is upon his position as a narrative poet, and as a narrative poet alone, that Coleridge must rest his principal claim to distinction. But the visionary and disjointed pieces which he has left us in this walk of his art, are not such as to entitle him to a place in the second division of poets, though they display genius which, had they been properly developed and matured, would undoubtedly have done so.

It is, therefore, to be regretted that one who appeared so capable of weaving enchanting melodies out of lofty themes, of ennobling man's nature by connecting him with the infinite, of setting right the tortuosities of the lower world by the laws of the higher, who exercised so potent a spell over spiritual forms that he could bring down their images with such effulgence as to dim the actual into shade, should have frittered away the great bulk of his energies in spasmodic effort, or in eking out a scanty provision for the common necessities of nature. Had society been juster to Coleridge, he might have been truer to himself. As it was, he early lost his sense of manly independence by having to lean on the bounty of others. This sucked the soul out of poetic inspiration, and drove him, as he sings himself, to seek relief in philosophic studies :—

There was a time * * *
When Hope grew round me, like the twining vine,
And fruits and foliage, not my own, seemed mine.
But now afflictions bow me down to the earth,
Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth ;

But, oh ! each visitation
Suspends what nature gave me at my birth,
My shaping spirit of imagination.
For not to think of what I needs must feel,
But to be still and patient all I can ;
And haply by abstruse research to steal
From my own nature all the natural man :
This was my sole resource, my only plan,
Till that which suits a part infects the whole,
And now is almost grown the habit of my soul.*

Coleridge, then, was driven by sheer force of circumstances to divide his allegiance between poetry and philosophy. He fell between two stools. Both claim him for their own, and both suffered from the too constant intrusion of its rival. Even now among his countrymen, he stands higher as a metaphysician than as a poet. But there can hardly be a doubt that, as philosophy becomes more known, this judgment will be reversed. For an accurate thinker Coleridge was not ; while as a poet, could his imagination have found free vent, could his keen perception have been unassailed by the coarse clamours of material existence, he would probably have left productions behind him second to none of his age.

* Ode to Dejection.

Southey.

THE Lake poets had a decided objection to be classed together as a school. Coleridge remonstrated with Jeffrey on this head, who promised to strike his name out of the firm. "I," he said, "object to Wordsworth's hobbies about childhood and the rustic nature of poetic language. Why, then, class me as one of his sect?" Southey was no less remonstrative. "I," said the author of "*Thalaba*," "dislike the lyrical ballads. Besides, two or three of my epics were written before I knew Wordsworth. It is, therefore, a blunder to place me in the same boat with him and Coleridge." These protests were rational enough, so far as regarded the different styles in which each poet worked out the same system. But they could not obliterate the identity of the principles which permeate the entire body of their poetry. Wordsworth is eminently psychological; Coleridge fantastically mystical; and Southey gorgeously objective. But none recognise the sensuous phases of that keen passion which lovers feel for each other; each lay the same stress upon the domestic affections as the great instrument in the hands of the muse for exalting human nature; each intrude the ethical principle into every department of their art; each consider simplicity of language as the form, and love of nature as the soul, of all true poetry; each regarded Pope as one of the lowest, and Cowper as one of the highest names in the English Parnassus. It was this unity of principle which has associated these writers in one class, notwithstanding

their clamorous assertions of self-independence and mutual dislike for each other's peculiarities.

It would seem that this desire of the Lake poets, each to stand upon his own basis, arose more or less from a feeling that they would lose somewhat of that intellectual height which each vainly flattered himself he was about to attain, if he had not reached the loftiest eminence already. For the Lake poets were above any other class of men gifted with a large amount of self-conceit, and with no ordinary sense of their own importance. Wordsworth would pull out his pieces with the ostentation of Statius, and exclaim, "If you don't admire that, you can have no discernment of the pure and beautiful in art." He told Crabbe Robinson he could not respect the mother who could read without emotion his poem,

"Once in a lonely hamlet I sojourned ;"

and he assured him that any reader who did not appreciate

"Two voices are there, one is of the sea,"

must be singularly deficient in intellectual refinement and moral purity. It is rich to hear Coleridge ascribe the first unpopularity of "The Ancient Mariner" to being linked with such stuff as "Peter Bell;" and Wordsworth repay the compliment by ascribing the unpopularity of "Peter Bell" to being weighted with "The Ancient Mariner." But Southey left his two compeers far behind in the vanity of self-adulation. His "History of Brazil" he compared to "Herodotus," and his "Madoc" to the "Odyssey." In one of his laureate odes he thus addresses himself,—

Thou whom rich nature at thy happy birth,
Blest in her bounty with the largest dower
That Heaven indulges to a child of earth.

And he subsequently informs his readers that all the good and wise admire him. He once kidnapped Shelley into his study

at Keswick, under the delusion that he had a fine treat in store for him, and, after he secured the doors, pulled out the voluminous roll of "Madoc," with which he dosed his hearer until the young enthusiast fell asleep under the table.* Southey has left it on record that he considered Scott's poems, in comparison to his own, as the mere offshoots of the cabbage-garden, contrasted in point of durability with the umbrageous oaks of the forest.† It does not speak much for his sincerity that, while expressing such opinions, he should in a letter to Sir Walter, of the same date, congratulate that gentleman on having, together with himself, scaled the highest summits of Parnassus. What Scott thought of the compliment does not appear; but, from the manner in which he tossed the laureateship to Southey, I fancy, he would have preferred going a little lower down, to sharing so exalted a position with his contemporary. But Scott's nature was chivalric. He had all the humility of a great genius. Instead of exalting himself at the expense of others, he saw so many defects in his own compositions that he could not bear to revert to them. He exclaimed, in the language of Macbeth,

"I am ashamed
To think on what I've done; look on't again,
I dare not."

This humiliating feeling is the mark of a great artist who is impressed with the wide chasm existing between his own performances and that ideal type of excellence which is ever haunting his soul. But where we get as its substitute a spirit of self-laudation, a disposition to seize upon every opportunity which presents itself, as a sort of platform for the mountebank exhibition of our own excellences, there the highest style of art cannot exist.

Though Southey stands much more apart from Coleridge

* Jefferson Hogg's "Life of Shelley."

† "Southey's Letters," in the Correspondence of Rt. Hon. J. W. Croker.

and Wordsworth than these do from each other, there is none in whom the principles of the school are more offensively predominant. In subjective poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge, who drew their stores out of their own minds, it was natural that their creations should reflect their own peculiar habits of thought ; but Southey was a poet eminently objective. His aim was to reproduce the actual ; and, therefore, when he attempted to build up lofty epics, illustrating national characteristics, upon the foundation of one-half of human nature, the result was a successive series of failures. Love is the cardinal passion of the human race. But Southey is at as much pains to keep his pages free from any spontaneous burst of that passion as if his poems, like the Greek plays, were intended as solemn adjuncts to a religious festival. His lovers, therefore, behave as coldly to each other as brother and sister. They are only so many abstract embodiments of the domestic virtues. The consequence is that a dreary pall of monotony hangs over most of his poems. His incidents lack variety ; his characters want relief. For sallies of inspiration, we get only amplifications of rhetoric ; for exquisite touches of nature, stilted sentimentality. He is in some measure obliged to be starch, and affected, and extravagant ; for in making use only of one-half of the elements of our common nature, he has to inflate the other half into undue proportions—to exaggerate a part until it bears some semblance to the whole.

To reproduce the actual, to make the past live over again in the present, requires a poet of very liberal sympathies, and with some practical acquaintance with the feelings, tendencies, and struggles of his own generation. But in both these qualities Southey was singularly deficient. Whether as regards the constructive powers within, or his knowledge, or his appreciation, of the real world without, he was about the last man to shape into so many living actualities the events of any spirit-stirring drama. His sympathies were narrow, and his experience of men as confined as his sympathies. The bigoted

unitarianism of his youth was only exchanged for a still more bigoted Calvinism in his mature age. Even Coleridge, ensheathed as he was in the glittering armour of the German philosophies, failed to inoculate his companion's hard mind with any insight into those distinctions which have revolutionized metaphysical science. Out of the contracted circle in which his views were confined, he seldom looked, except to hiss out, in short glittering epigrammatic sentences, his dislikes for the dense bulk of humanity lying beyond his own pale of orthodoxy. That such a man should confine himself to his library, and abandon the great world for books, was strictly in keeping with his mental constitution, and with the exclusive doctrines that constitution had espoused; but that he should attempt to rival Homer or Dante was a serious blunder. His habits acted upon his temperament, and his exclusive opinions upon both, to generate that state of mind in which any truthful delineation of mankind, engaged upon the broad highways of human action, was a sheer impossibility.

Southey's strong point is the delineation of natural scenery; the weakest, the selection of commonplace topics, which, in his epics, he amplifies with such prolixity that the jaded reader abandons the subject through very irksomeness of the flesh. The avoiding all passionate emotions which would conflict with his system of ethics necessarily narrowed the variety of combinations into which he could mould his fable, and threw him upon the upholsteries of his subject. His characters, in consequence of not being brought into positions in which their genuine nature can be developed, are mere pasteboard creations, and cease to interest us in proportion as they are removed from common life. In "Madoc" there were several incidents capable of romantic treatment, but these were ruthlessly thrust aside for embassies, state ceremonials, religious processions, jarring family discords, battles, and marriage feasts, not having the poor merit of being dovetailed into each other, but standing apart like isolated facts within the memory of a disjointed

experience. Madoc himself is one of those perfect characters of whom the reader entertains not the slightest hopes after the first half-dozen pages. His virtues, and those of his companions, whatever merit they might have in a sermon, are irreclaimably stupid in an epic. Southey appears to have laboured under the delusion that he could make prosaic topics interesting by the force of his rhetoric, as Wordsworth made prosaic characters interesting by the force of his genius.

No poet could ever have a subject embracing more variety of romantic detail than "The Fall of Roderic." The shock of battles, diversified by the tale of innocent and guilty love ; the Christian faith sinking beneath the superior weight of the Mussulman, only to be restored by the rekindled fires of patriotism ; the archbishop forsaking his mitre for the turban, in order to satisfy the cravings of voluptuous passion, and the wilder dreams of a regal ambition ; the contrast of Moorish costumes with the garb of Spanish mountaineers commingling, either in fight or festive revelry, among the most sublime and picturesque fastnesses of the Asturias ; the plotting chieftain and the ascetic monk ; the faithless wife who achieves her husband's ruin, that she may consummate her guilty passion in the arms of his Moorish rival ;—all these formed the materials of a series of sensational groupings, which, in the hand of a master, would not have allowed the reader to lay down the book until the whole story had gone through his mind. But in the hands of Southey no interest is awakened ; the theme becomes dull and spiritless. There is not the slightest attempt at construction of plot. By-*tales* which might have formed agreeable episodes, if treated apart, are confusedly entangled with the main trunk of the story. No character excites our sympathy ; the sequence of no event, our curiosity. We are never made breathless with the untrammelling of consequences, or dazed with the electric shocks of passion, till

"Function is smothered in surmise,
And nothing is but what is not :"

for the poet has here, as in "Madoc," the unhappy knack of passing over the romantic features of his story, while he reserves all his prolixity for the treatment of its baldest incidents, or of such topics as merely afford scope for objective imitation. The loves of Florinda and Roderic; Egelona's desertion of the Goth for the Moor; the intrigues of Guisla and Oppas,—these hardly come in for a passing glance. But the reader is wearied to death with the pageantry of war, with the ceremony of knighthood, with the pomp of coronations, with the vagabond wanderings of Roderic, and insipid discussions upon free-will and fate, until he closes the book with despair, feeling that a great subject has been lost for want of a great master.

Southey has shown more ability in "Thalaba" and "Kehama" than in "Madoc" or "Roderic." For here his talent for gorgeous scene-painting had fuller scope, and his want of power to reproduce the actual is not so sensibly felt in the delineation of beings who belong to the fairy world of Eastern imagination. But it is this circumstance which must ever prevent these poems from acquiring a strong hold over the popular mind. We are too insulated to take much interest even in fiction intertwined with continental life and manners; but when we come to tales enveloped in the crust of Indian or Arabian mythologies, stript of the passionate witchery and love intrigues which could alone make them life-like or interesting, our feelings amount to something like revulsion. The wizard tricks and demon enchantments which form the staple material of these poems; the embodiment of the filial virtues in the chief personages, and the complete manner in which the actors ignore all their flesh-and-blood impulses, make these stories suitable intellectual food for the nursery; but the classical and ornate diction in which they are conveyed must always erect an impassable barrier between them and the juvenile members of the community.

Southey, it appears, had some idea of embodying the principal mythologies of the world in so many narrative poems, as

Homer and Virgil in their epics had embodied the religion of Rome and Greece. Could he have done as much in "Kehama" and "Thalaba" for the creed of the Brahmin or the Mahometan, I readily allow, these epics, under one point of view, would have been natural, as representing the feelings and embodying the convictions of a large section of the human race. We should then have had a standard by which to judge of their propriety, of their truthfulness to nature, and of their adequacy as pictures of the state of society which they attempt to represent. But this is the very point in which the poet breaks down. No man would recognise in Thalaba the cold, austere, moonstruck vagrant, dead to all charms of female voluptuousness, a type of his race, any more than in the chaste Oneiza, one of those seductive houri, the indulgence in whose multiplied society, and not their solitary companionship, constitutes the Mahometan's highest conception of bliss. The fact is, Southey has combined with the external ritual, ablutions, and prayers of Mahometanism, the sombre virtues and rewards of Calvinistic Christianity,—a combination as incongruous as the blending of summer and winter in the same picture. In "Kehama," the same grotesque associations are carried out. Though the Hindoo and Mahometan religions stand out in bold conflict with each other, Southey can see no other points of difference but the omission of the ablutions, and the introduction of more supernatural spheres, giving wider scope to pantomimic trick and wizard machinery. There is hardly a character, or combination of incidents, in the one story which has not its counterpart in the other. Kailyal is only another name for Oneiza, and Ladurlad for Moath, as Kehama is for Mohareb, Khawla for the Lorrinite, and Thalaba for Glendoveer. Oneiza is attempted to be ravished by Aloadin, as Kailyal is by Arvalan. The palatial structures of Shedad correspond to those of the submarine city of Baly, and the cave of Domdaniel to the vaults of Padalon. Where the incidents are varied in "Kehama," it is rather to remove the story to a still farther

distance from the Hindoo system, than to bring us closer to it. In that system, if one thing be more prominent than another, it is the spirit of caste, excluding anything like an interchange of affection between women and the higher spiritual powers. Yet this intercommunion of sentiment, this equality of feeling, so repugnant to the fundamental notions of the Hindoo religion, is made the cardinal hinge on which the whole poem turns. Kailyal, after going through a series of flirtations with Glendoveer, is transported along with that spirit to the bowers of bliss. This is about as incongruous as if Moore, with a view of illustrating the spirit of Christianity, had made the embrace of his angels* the means of spiritualizing the voluptuous creatures who had drawn them from their spheres, and sent the women back with them to carry on their carnal intercourse in heaven.

If the loves of Kailyal and Glendoveer are little in accordance with the Hindoo religion, they are as much out of conformity with nature. The style in which they are depicted strongly remind us of what we occasionally hear at burlesques. This arose in some degree from the necessity of the situation, which forced him to represent love in its spiritual aspects,—a task for which he was utterly unfitted, as well as from a feeling that anything bordering on the sensuous divorced poetry from the austere ethical views it seems to have been a fundamental principle of the Lake school to inculcate. When, therefore, Southey brings his characters into such a position as to lead his readers to expect a burst of genuine passion, instead of the mixed play of feeling, the infinitely diversified blending of the ethereal with the sensuous which constitutes love, he is obliged to introduce some ridiculous machinery, some prosaic incident, some stage trick to fill up the foreground, which completely mars the effect of the picture, and awakens in his readers no other feelings but those of disappointment. No poet, perhaps, ever had a finer occasion for the display of his powers in this

* "Loves of the Angels."

branch of his art than Southey, when he lands the Glendoveer and Kailal on Mount Meru. The maid was the fairest of the daughters of men. The spirit is described as ethereally accoutred with archangelic wings, in whose face youth smiled celestial, and in whose limbs was agility of strength combined with graceful curvature of beauty. Here an occasion presented itself for eclipsing Byron and Moore on their own ground, by bringing out into bold relief the spiritual traits of this passion, of which they had given us too much of the mere material element. But how does Southey turn it to account? Instead of marking in the two lovers the dawn of that passion whose growth is as ethereal as the first flashes of light which morning paints upon an Eastern sky, Southey makes Glendoveer first engage the affections of Kailal by performing a series of aquatic feats in the lake spread out at her feet, at which she gazes with the same amazement as a village girl astounded at the somersaults of a tumbler at a fair. To put an end to this unsatisfactory state of things, Camdeo, a sort of Indian Cupid, is introduced, "riding," as the poet phrases it, "on his Lory."

"O ye," he cried, "who have defied
The Rajah, will ye mock my power?

* * * * *

Shall ye alone, of all in story,
Boast impenetrable hearts?
Hover here, my gentle Lory,
Gently hover, while I see
To whom has fate decreed the glory,
To the Glendoveer or me."

While thus ejaculating, Glendoveer

Moved slowly o'er the lake with gliding flight;
Anon, with sudden stroke and strong,
In rapid course careering swept along;
Now shooting downward from his heavenly height,
Plunged in the deep below;

Then rising, soared again,
And shook the sparkling waters off like rain.*

At him thus engaged Camdeo let fly, but with no effect, for a man in a cold bath is not likely to be wounded by the fiery darts of love :—

“ Ah, wanton !” cried the Glendoveer,
“ Go, aim at idler hearts,
Thy skill is baffled here !
A deeper love I bear that maid divine—
A love that springeth from a higher will,
A holier power than thine !”

Then Camdeo tries his skill upon Kailyal with the same result :—

“ Ah, wanton !” cried the Glendoveer,
“ No power hast thou for mischief here !
Choose thou some idle breast,
For these are proof, by nobler thoughts possest.
Go, to thy plains of Matra, go,
And string again thy broken bow.”†

Now it turns out in the sequel that the Glendoveer and Kailyal were all along deeply in love with each other. This piece of purism is, therefore, as much out of character with nature and the drift of the poem, as it is in keeping with the burlesque imagery and silly language in which it is expressed.

Southey's strength in these two epics lies in mere objective description. He materializes everything. His imitations are never flushed with the lines of the imaginative element. In painting even his best scenes of love or terror, he copies the outward lineaments of his objects, without imparting any of the fire or Promethean force which kindles the life within. The world of impressions which other poets awaken by a startling metaphor or simile, as Spenser with his

* “Curse of Kehama,”—Mount Meru, b. x., s. 19, 20.

† *Ibid*, b. x., s. 21, 23.

Una's angel face,
Which made a sunshine in a shady place ;
or Milton's description of Satan, startling the two fair angels, by springing suddenly into the air like a sudden blaze from the ignition of a heap of gunpowder, we get a mere catalogue of the physical properties which the object of his description makes palpable to the senses. One of the best passages in "*Kehama*," which aims at spiritual embodiment, is that depicting the horror which Kailyal feels on encountering Arvalan :—

That spectre fixed his eyes upon her full ;—
The light which shone in their accursèd orbs
Was like a light from hell,
And it grew deeper, kindling with the view.
She could not turn her sight
From that infernal gaze, which like a spell
Bound her, and held her rooted to the ground.
It palsied every power,
Her limbs avail'd her not in that dread hour,
There was no moving thence ;
Thought, memory, sense, were gone :
She heard not now the tiger's nearer cry,
She thought not on her father now,
Her cold heart's-blood ran back,
Her hand lay senseless on the bough it clasp'd,
Her feet were motionless ;
Her fascinated eyes
Like the stone eye-balls of a statue fix'd,
Yet conscious of the sight that blasted them.*

But who does not recognise here mere mechanical or routine description, the same effect weakened by iterated strokes,—the form rooted to the ground, the motionless feet, the limbs which would not be moved, the benumbed sense, or if anything more spiritual is attempted, as the light in Arvalan's eyes kindling with the view, and shining like light from hell, who does not perceive in the effort the weakest possible reflex of sublime pas-

* "*The Separation*," b. v., s. 12.

sages, which in the compass of a line and a half compress more thought than Southey could possibly convey in a volume? The fact is there is little scope for mere objective description in delineating the higher phases of feeling or action, and when Southey ventures into this sphere, he has to replace the life-creating thought and consuming fire, which can alone give birth and impart animation to great conceptions, by rhetorical amplitude and spasmodic expression. Hence, in developing human incident, he is generally weak, prolix, and unaffective. His characters seem to move like certain pasteboard figures on wires, and to be jerked into their positions by no governing impulses which human nature can supply. But in the delineation of inanimate nature, in reproducing the material features of imposing scenery—in any combination, in fact, of external objects which does not require the exertion of a lofty imagination or an original fancy to impress upon the mind, there the poet is omnipotent.

Southey's talent for scene-painting—call it slapdash if you will, yet marvellous of its kind—is splendidly evinced in his description of the ancient sepulchres and submarine city of Baly, which makes us doubly regret that the rest of the poem should not have been executed in the same masterly spirit. For the material splendour of his scenery is out of all character with the mean figures and incidents in the foreground which stand out in wretched contrast with the gorgeous appendages they are supposed to enliven by their presence. The mountains of Cumberland fed his passion for waterfalls, and he always reproduces them in his pages with great force, as in “Thalaba :”—

Silent and calm the river rolled along,
And at the verge arrived
Of that fair garden, o'er a rocky bed
Toward the mountain base,
Still full and silent, held its even way.
But farther as they went its deepening sound

Louder and louder in the distance rose,
 As if it forced its stream,
 Struggling through crags along a narrow pass.
 And lo ! where raving o'er a hollow course
 The ever-flowing flood
 Foams in a thousand whirlpools ; there adown
 The perforated rock,
 Plunge the whole waters ; so precipitous,
 So fathomless a fall,
 That their earth-shaking roar came deaden'd up
 Like subterranean thunders.*

The source of the Ganges in "Kehama" could not be passed by without a similar effort, though the researches of Captain Speke, which Southey seems to have anticipated, have somewhat dimmed the merit of the discovery :—

None hath seen its secret fountain ;
 But on the top of Meru mountain,
 Which rises o'er the hills of earth,
 In light and clouds it hath its mortal birth.
 Earth seems that pinnacle to rear
 Sublime above this worldly sphere—
 Its cradle, and its altar, and its throne ;
 And there the new-born river lies
 Outspread beneath its native skies,
 As if it there would love to dwell
 Alone and unapproachable.
 Soon flowing forward and resign'd
 To the will of the Creating Mind,
 It springs at once, with sudden leap,
 Down from the immeasurable steep.
 From rock to rock, with shivering force rebounding,
 The mighty cataract rushes—heaven arounding,
 Like thunder, with the incessant roar resounding,
 And Meru's summit shaking with the sound.
 Wide spreads the snowy foam—the sparkling spray
 Dances aloft ; and ever there at morning
 The earliest sunbeams haste to wing their way,
 With rainbow-wreaths the holy stream adorning.

* "Thalaba," b. vii., s. 6.

And duly the adoring moon at night
Sheds her white glory there,
And in the watery air
Suspends her halo-crowns of silver light.*

The immolation of Arvalan's wives is also vividly depicted, and the contrast between the wild tumult and bacchanalian uproar of the Juggernaut procession and the placid appearance of nature, well brought out :—

O silent Night, how have they startled thee
With the brazen trumpet's blare !
And thou, O moon, whose quiet light serene
Filleth wide heaven, and bathing hill and wood,
Spreads o'er the peaceful valley like a flood,
How have they dimm'd thee with the torches' glare,
Which round yon moving pageant flame and flare,
As the wild rout, with deafening song and shout,
Fling their long flashes out,
That, like infernal lightnings, fire the air.†

Towards the close of his poem, Southey transports us to the world's end, where souls are described, in a manner which too painfully reminds us of Dante, waiting upon the distant shore, to be transported to the presence of Yamen, the great judge seated upon the confines of hell. Among these are wailing infants, young widows sacrificed at their husbands' funereal piles, and other "victims of offences not their own," whose

Innocent souls ! thus set so early free
From sin and sorrow and mortality,
Their spotless spirits all-creating love
Received into its universal breast.
Yon blue serene above
Was their domain ; clouds pillowed them to rest ;

* "Curse of Kehama,"—Mount Meru, Book x., s. 3.

† *Ibid.* Jaga-Naut, Book xiv., s. 4.

The elements on them like nurses tended,
 And with their growth ethereal substance blended.
 Less pure than these is that strange Indian bird,
 Who never dips in earthly streams her bill,
 But, when the sound of coming showers is heard,
 Looks up, and from the clouds receives her fill.
 Less pure the footless fowl of Heaven, that never
 Rest upon earth, but on the wing for ever
 Hovering o'er flowers, their fragrant food inhale,
 Drink the descending dew upon its way,
 And sleep aloft while floating on the gale.*

But all these beauties only refer to material description.
 Nor are there any passages purely spiritual in the whole poem,
 except the well-known lines,

“They sin who tell us Love can die,”

which gleams like a fluted pillar of light upon the cloudy atmosphere by which they are surrounded. I do not, therefore, think the “Curse of Kehama,” which most of Southey’s admirers regard as his *chef-d’œuvre*, entitled to rank very high as an epic. The performance is unequal, the incidents unnatural and grotesque, the characters too monkish for Oriental fiction, and the beauties nearly all appertain to an inferior department of art, that of the lower order of imitation.

In “Thalaba,” the beauties do not belong to a higher class than those in “Kehama,” but the poem is free from much of the slipshod writing which disfigures the Indian poem. The absence of rhyme puts the poet on his mettle to express his conceptions in the most forcible manner. His commonplaces are never drest up in that sing-song which reminds us of pantomimes and theatrical burlesques, but are always couched in sonorous language. The plot is also better constructed. In the “Curse of Kehama,” we frequently lose sight of the leading, in the subordinate, characters of the poem; but in the Arabian

* “Curse of Kehama,”—The World’s End, Book xxi., s. 6.

story, amid all the windings of the plot and pantomimic change of scenery, *Thalaba* is ever present, as the central figure to which all the incidents of the piece relates. The attachment between *Thalaba* and *Oneiza* is also more naturally developed than that between the *Glendoveer* and *Kailyal*, which begins in canting hypocrisy, and ends in cloudy mysticism. Though the poet, in the cottage of *Moath*, in the gardens of *Aloadin*, and in the sepulchre, threw away, as is his wont, three grand occasions for portraying earthly love in the principal stages of its existence—viz., its birth, its possession of the object, and the death-like eclipse which steeps the heart in the shadows of the grave when that object is withdrawn,—still he gives his reader just enough to make him understand that *Thalaba* and *Oneiza* each pine for the other, as that something without which life cannot be realized :

“Thee first, thee last, thee midst, thee without end.”

It is for these reasons that, as a work of art, I place “*Thalaba*,” as did Shelley and Southey himself, above all his other epics.

Whatever this poet saw he could group with multiform combinations into definite pictures, as pleasing and diversified as ever glowed in the imaginations of Poussin or Lorraine ; but whatever was removed from the sphere of actuality was evidently above his reach. Where materialities end, there Southey's difficulties begin. Hence his magicians and his spirits, whether of the good or bad order, so far as their features are not limned from the models of Spenser, are wretched creations. He gets on as miserably in the lofty regions of *Swerga*, as in the abyssmal vaults of *Domdaniel*. But in “*Thalaba*,” most of the incidents take place on the earth. We are only transplanted, on one or two of these occasions, beneath the roots of the ocean, to see the plots concocted which are to circumvent *Thalaba* among the wildest scenery that ever dazzled the imagination of man. The resemblance of the

garden of Aloadin, in its general outline, to the opening scene in "Rasselas," is forgotten in the following picture :—

It was broad moonlight, and obscure or lost
 The garden beauties lay,
 But the great boundary rose, distinctly mark'd.
 These were no little hills,
 No sloping uplands lifting to the sun
 Their vineyards, with fresh verdure, and the shade
 Of ancient woods, courting the loiterer
 To win the easy ascent : stone mountains these.
 Desolate rock on rock,
 The burthens of the earth,
 Whose snowy summits met the morning beam,
 When night was in the vale, whose feet were fix'd
 In the world's foundations. Thalaba beheld
 The heights precipitous,
 Impending crags, rocks unascendible,
 And summits that had tired the eagle's wing.*

But the poet is most at home in reproducing the enchantments of his own Cumberland scenery :—

In mazy windings o'er the vale
 A thousand streamlets stray'd,
 And in their endless course
 Had intersected deep the stony soil,
 With labyrinthine channels islanding
 A thousand rocks, which seem'd
 Amid the multitudinous waters there
 Like clouds that freckle o'er the summer sky,
 The blue ethereal ocean circling each,
 And insulating all.†

The following little piece might suit an Academician for his next picture, though he could not give us the charming combination of liquid sounds which make the flowing waters splash music in our ears :—

* Book vii., s. 4.

† Book vi., s. 10.

The moonlight lay upon the rocks ;
 Their crags were visible,
 The shade of jutting cliffs,
 And where broad lichens whiten'd some smooth spot,
 And where the ivy hung
 Its flowing tresses down.
 A little way within the cave
 The moonlight fell, glossing the sable tide
 That gush'd tumultuous out.*

In the delight which Thalaba experienced in the gardens of Aloadin, it would be hard to say which sense was most gratified, if we leave touch out of the question. First, the sight—

Thalaba stood mute,
 And passively received
 The mingled joy which flowed on every sense.
 Where'er his eye could reach
 Fair structures, rainbow-hued, arose ;
 And rich pavilions through the opening woods
 Gleam'd from their waving curtains sunny gold ;
 And winding through the verdant vale,
 Went streams of liquid light ;
 And fluted cypresses rear'd up
 Their living obelisks ;
 And broad-leaved plane-trees in long colonnades
 O'er-arched delightful walks,
 Where round their trunks the thousand-tendrill'd vine
 Wound up and hung the boughs with greener wreaths,
 And clusters not their own.
 Beside him teems the earth
 With tulips, like the ruddy evening streak'd ;
 And here the lily hangs her head of snow ;
 And here amid her sable cup
 Shines the red-eye spot, like one brightest star,
 The solitary twinkler of the night ;
 And here the rose expands
 Her paradise of leaves.†

* Book v., s. 22.

† Book vi., s. 20.

Then the ear—

Far music and the distance-mellow'd song
 From bowers of merriment ;
 The waterfall remote ;
 The murmuring of the leafy groves ;
 The single nightingale
 Perch'd in the rosier by, so richly toned,
 That never from that most melodious bird,
 Singing a love-song to his brooding mate,
 Did Thracian shepherd by the grave
 Of Orpheus hear a sweeter melody,
 Though there the spirit of the sepulchre
 All his own power infuse, to swell
 The incense that he loves.*

And afterwards the smell—

And oh ! what odours the voluptuous vale
 Scatters from jasmine bowers,
 From yon rose wilderness,
 From cluster'd henna and from orange groves,
 That with sweet perfume fill the breeze.

* * * *

Such odours flow'd upon the world,
 When at Mohammed's nuptials, word
 Went forth in Heaven, to roll
 The everlasting gates of Paradise
 Back on their living hinges, that its gales
 Might visit all below ; the general bliss
 Thrill'd every bosom, and the family
 Of man, for once, partook one common joy.†

To this paradise, whose beauties are distinctly labelled and catalogued under three appropriate heads, Thalaba is admitted in the usual manner through gates which spontaneously open at the sound of a horn suspended, like our modern rustic villa bells, at the entrance. But these gates close in a manner which makes the reader imagine he hears the sound reverbera-

* Book vi., s. 21.

† Book vi., s. 23.

ting behind him, and that he has got in, as well as Thalaba himself :—

Like a long thunder-peal,
From rock to rock rebounding rung the blast,
The gates of iron, by no human arm
Unfolded, turning on their hinges slow,
Disclosed the passage of the rock.
He entered, and the iron gates fell to,
And with a clap like thunder closed him in.*

The cave of the giant Zohak, with the two serpents growing out of his shoulders, which supplied Macaulay with his apt illustration of the position of England with respect to the Irish and Scotch churches, whoever reads is not likely to forget. Indeed, the whole of the fifth and sixth books, being written in the same graphic style, will make "Thalaba" an acceptable book, when the "Curse of Kehama" is remembered with indifference, and "Madoc" or "Roderic" are forgotten.

But placing "Thalaba" as high as its splendid imagery and forcible diction will warrant, few of its beauties are of an ideal character. They strike the senses, but seldom reach the heart. No fiction can excite our emotions without verisimilitude. In "Thalaba," however, there is hardly a line that bears any likeness to nature. Contrast, with this epic, the unpretending tale of "Paraguay," the only poem in which Southey kindles genuine pathos. Here the incidents, which are of the simplest kind, the poet details in the simplest manner, but with traits of character so life-like, and with scenic colouring so real, that we feel as keen a sympathy for the Indian family, as if we had been acquainted with the group in their prairie solitude, and saw them wither like pent-up plants in the atmosphere of refinement. But in "Thalaba" the style is as gorgeous as the incidents are grand and complex. Yet we follow the hero through his course with the same unconcern as if he belonged to another sphere; while in the simpler story, the decline of Mooma and

* Book vi., s. 16.

the visions, which bring down heaven to the bedside of Yeruti, impress the mind with all the appearance of truth. We cannot get it out of our head for a moment that the more pretentious effusion is only a wild freak of the imagination. The most credulous, therefore, remain unaffected by the greatest perils of Thalaba; while the most callous find it difficult to restrain their emotion over the three graves dug by civilization for the denizens of the wilderness. The little poem is spiritual, and therefore mighty; but the great poem is so material that it becomes immaterial.

I do not know that the scenic beauties of "Thalaba," great as they are, or the construction of the plot, scientific or original as I must allow it to be, ought to go farther, were it not for his ballads, and his metrical tales, than to place Southey at the head of the fourth-class poets. Perfection of scene-painting, when accompanied with imperfect delineation of character, is, after all, not a very high accomplishment; and all Southey's personages had neither the general attributes of a class, nor the peculiar features of an individual. They are either too angelic or too demoniacal for flesh and blood in this world of ours, which generally blends great passions with great virtues, and wherein the best men never appear without some alloy of vice, or the worst, without some gleams of their ethereal nature breaking through the darkness of their crimes. It is this composite character, this halting to indulge two conflicting principles, this following the worse, while approving of the better course, which makes human character so interesting in the hands of the idealist, but which Southey, altogether, has lost sight of in his epics. Kailyal and Oneiga, as well as Thalaba and the Glendoveer, are only fit company for seraphs; Kehama, Arvalan, and Aloadin are only fit company for fiends. Madoc is an angel, David a butchering savage, and Roderic, after his overthrow, a faultless hermit. Natural scenery we have in all its luscious varieties, of lake, mountain, dell, pine forest, myriad-tongued ocean, bold headland, gushing fountain, or sweeping

river, either reflecting or keeping each other in countenance with their quiet harmonies of light, form, and colour ; but we seek in vain for the inhabitants of earth, among the angelic or haggard creatures whom the poet has summoned to people it from other spheres. But in his ballads we get among genuine men and women. The simplicity of the treatment is quite in keeping with that of the subject. Our curiosity is aroused at the commencement, and is kept alive to the end. They combine the perfection of the ballad style, that is, quiet irony intermingled with charming naïvete, stirring incident, and deep pathos. Having small canvas for his picture, Southey at once seizes upon the salient features of the subject, and discards the fatal prolixity which mars most of his heavier productions. The "Maid of the Inn," the "Well of St. Keyne," the "Battle of Blenheim," the "Inchcape Rock," place Southey at the head of the ballad, while his "Madoc" and his "Roderic" place him very nearly at the tail of the epic poets of his country. Southey is the only artist we know whose merits may be said to vary in inverse proportion to the length of his performances. His "Joan of Arc" and "Thalaba" are the shortest and best of his epics. His "Tale of Paraguay" is shorter and better than either. But his ballads, which are shorter still, are the best of all.

The characteristics of the Lake School may be summed up in a very few words. They each took the love of nature and domesticity as imaged in Thomson and Cowper's natural style, as their basis. Upon this Wordsworth grafted a large amount of ideality, the habit of investing the simplest objects with a feeling of the infinite, and of analyzing with metaphysical subtilty the spiritual intercommunion between the human mind and the external universe. But Southey applied the Cowperian style to the production of historical poems, in which nothing further was sought than a series of dramatic pictures, with a vivid delineation of material nature as a background, except that in his oriental poems, Cowper is dismissed for Dr. Sayer. We are,

however, in the bulk of Southey's pieces, never taken out of the actual world. The spiritualities sustaining, and giving, in fact, embodiment to external phenomena are never made apparent. Our attention is exclusively engrossed by the material lineaments of pictures selected, for the most part, from the commonest phases of humanity. This is the reason why people have all along, perhaps unconsciously to themselves, placed the later laureate very high up in the second division of poets, and his predecessor very low down in the third. I have no wish to disturb that arrangement, unless it be to advance Southey a grade or two in the list, and to rescue his oriental epics from that complete oblivion which appears to be fast settling over them. Coleridge stands midway between his two neighbours. In his earlier pieces he sought to unite the rustic graces of Cowper with the elegiac tenderness of Collins ; in his later, with the mysticism of German metaphysics. We get, therefore, a large amount of ideality in his pieces. The material only serves to illustrate the spiritual, and never, as in Southey, to conceal it. We are constantly in his poetry hovering between two worlds. But his indolence, his desultory studies, his fluctuating resolves, his purposeless efforts, his disjointed pursuits and intemperate habits of conversationalizing, hindered him from carrying these advantages so far as to place his name even within the same division as Wordsworth.

CHAPTER VIII.

CLASSICAL SCHOOL.

Gifford.

THE Classical School seems to have adopted satire as its peculiar province. Hudibras is the only satirical poet who did not wield his lash in the English heroic couplet. All the other leading satirists of our language, Donne, Pope, Dryden, Churchill, Johnson, employed the pentameter. As the follies of mankind are not very obtrusive in the country, as the stage on which they love to display their eccentricities is reserved for large towns, it almost follows as a matter of course that the language should be as artificial as the subjects on which it is employed. It would ill become the Muse, on abandoning the upland or the dell for the Mall or the Row, if she did not exchange her rustic dress for the meretricious ornaments of fashionable life. As the Roman poets, even while cultivating their farms, never lashed the vices of the Suburra except in heroics, the English poets thought they could not do less. But our English satirists have drawn the connection between conventional themes and classical treatment closer than was necessary, by making their poems mere paraphrases of Roman satires. The example which Pope set in adopting Horace as his model, was followed by Johnson, who paraphrased Juvenal, and by Gifford, who imitated Perseus.

It appears that towards the close of last century, a coterie of literary aspirants happened to domesticate themselves at

Florence. Mrs. Thrale, the brewer's widow, who betook herself thither after losing caste in England by her marriage with Piozzi, opened her salons for their reception. There, used to congregate Mr. Merry, a son of a country magistrate, who had abandoned the bar for the Muses; Mrs. Robinson, the seductive actress, who had in turn captivated the heart of the Prince Regent and Charles Fox; Mrs. Cowley, who was anxious to reinvigorate the waning empire of beauty by an extraordinary display of sentiment; and Mr. Parsons, who regarded poetic rapture in woman as a genuine proof of voluptuous sensibility. These people, whom congenial tastes brought together, soon found themselves engaged in addressing amatory poetry to each other. They imagined themselves like the swains and shepherdesses of Fontenelle, to unite in their persons the ingenuous transports of rustic life with the exquisite tastes of polished society. Their effusions were circulated under feigned names, with a view to create, while appearing to elude, public inquiry. Merry signed himself *Della Crusca*; Mrs. Robinson, Julia and Laura Maria; Mrs. Piozzi, Anna Matilda; Parsons, Carlos. It was at Mrs. Piozzi's reunions that Merry recited, with the gesticulations of Statius, to the delight of a languishing auditory, his great poem, "The Wreath of Liberty,"—a philosophical rhapsody in praise of the French Revolution, which was to transmit his name to future generations. From the opening lines it would appear that Merry was only an earlier edition of "Satan" Montgomery:—

Genius or muse, whoe'er thou art, whose thrill
Exalts the fancy or inflames the will;
Bids on the heart sublime sensation roll,
And wakes ecstatic fervour in the soul.

But the tinsel was just of that kind to waken enthusiasm in the hearts of his female admirers, and the celestial Robinson, fresh from the revels of Drury Lane, could thus address her *Della Crusca*:

When amidst ethereal fire
Thou strik'st thy *Della Cruscan* lyre,

Round to catch the heavenly song,
Myriads of wondering seraphs throng.

And again,—

O thou, to whom superior worth allied,
Thy country's honour and thy Muse's pride,
Thy genius flows in every classic line,
And Nature dictates everything that's thine.

Merry seems to have been prodigiously gratified with this incense from the altar of beauty, and implored the fair one to

Let the streaming lightnings fly
In liquid peril from her eye :

But he does not appear to have been of that mood which his name would indicate, for we find him presently exclaiming—

Conjure up demons from the main,
Storm upon storm indignant heap,
Bid ocean howl and nature weep,
Till the Creator blush to see
How horrible His world can be !
While I will glory to blaspheme,
And make the joys of hell my theme :

simply because Mrs. Robinson would not open her eyes. With Anna Matilda, who was equally profuse in his praise, he appears to have got on a little better, though her inexorable correctness made him express his griefs so awkwardly that gaping fiends might think he was triumphing over her virtue:—

Yes, I will prove that I deserve my fate,
Was born for anguish, and was formed for hate,
With such transcendent woe will breathe my sigh,
That envying fiends will think it ecstasy.

To which the fair Matilda replied,—

Ne'er shalt thou know to sigh,
Nor on a soft idea die,
Ne'er on a recollection grasp
Thy arms——

The following lines of Merry were always thought by his fair admirers to eclipse Pope :—

From a young grove's shade,
Where infant boughs but mock the expecting glade,
Sweet sounds stole forth upborne upon the gale,
Pressed through the air and broke upon the vale,
Then silent walked the breezes of the plain,
Or soared aloft and seized the hovering strain.

It will be readily imagined that the little English colony at Florence was too small a theatre for the display of genius so startling, and a cargo of the poetry was shipped to London, where a clique of literary coxcombs, headed by Este, had just started a periodical called "The World." The new wares were just fitted for the vehicle, ready to launch them into notice. Every week there appeared in its columns, with a short eulogistic preface, some nonsense, which Merry, the Anacreon of the party, had addressed to Sappho (Mrs. Robinson), or some strain which Greathead, who assumed the part of Horace, poured into the heart of his Delia (Mrs. Cowley). With the rapidity of flame among dry rushes, the epidemic spread not less among editors, anxious to compete with Este for the honour of introducing this stuff to the public, than among the fat dowagers and sickly sentimentalists, eager to prolong the follies of their youth by enacting the scenes of Mrs. Piozzi's reunions over again. Mr. Bell, of the "Oracle," and Urban, of the "Gentleman's Magazine," besides the "Gazetteer," opened their pages to the new contributors. The strains from Florence were re-echoed in still more foolish ditties by the Julias, the Jerninghams, the Edwins, and Tophams of London. Reuben could thus waft his vows to the stout shepherdess in the "Oracle," who signed herself Anna Matilda :—

To thee a stranger dares address his theme,
To thee, proud mistress of Apollo's lyre,
One ray emitted from thy golden gleam,
Prompted by love, would set the world on fire.

To which the stout shepherdess replied,—

This resuscitating praise
Breathes life upon my dying days ;
But, bard polite, how hard the task,
Which with such elegance you ask !

Bell, who made himself a vehicle for this sort of interchange, roundly declared, in his pompous introductory preludes, that much of Greathead's poetry was equal to Pindar's, while he was certain that a sonnet of Mrs. Robinson's, addressed to the Nightingale, could not be touched by Milton. Dr. Tasker, a gentleman who should have known better, thus reinforced the discriminating criticism of Bell :—

In Ancient Greece two glorious forms were seen,
Wisdom's stern goddess and Love's smiling queen,
Pallas presided over arms and arts,
And Venus over gentle virgins' hearts ;
But now both powers in one fair form combine,
And in famed Robinson united shine.

The result of this systematic "puffing" was, that Harris, manager of Covent Garden, was induced to accept a tragedy of Merry's, called "Lorenzo," which actually made its author, for a few brief nights, the hero of the town. Merry came over to London, and announced himself to his followers by a sonnet. He grew jealous of Greathead's advances with the fair contributors to the "Oracle," and exchanged still more furious vows with Anna Matilda. The fever at last grew to a frenzy. Even the swains and sempstresses of the provinces caught the infection, till every periodical in the country resounded with nonsense and Della Crùsca.

It was to brush this swarm of fools away that Gifford seems to have been sent into the world ; for I do not know that he did anything else worthy of special regard. But the glory of restoring Milton and Pope to the places of which they had been dispossessed by Merry and Topham, appears to have surrounded him with a factitious halo out of all proportion to his

real merits. The extravagant praises of Byron, who regarded him as a satirist second to none in our literature, have also placed him upon a pedestal to which his works give him no claim. For Gifford was by no means an original genius, even in the poor sense of casting the conceptions of others into the crucible of a fiery imagination, to startle the reader with old thoughts under new combinations. His performances are simply a very good reflex of the favourite authors, in the study of whom he sauntered away his early manhood under the beeches of Eaton Hall. He is tender as well as epigrammatic ; but neither his gushes of passion, nor sallies of wit, are ever so strong as to discard conventional language, and clothe themselves in the imagery of nature. His lines on "Anna," and those addressed to a "Tuft of Early Violets," are mere echoes—the one from Collins, the other from Prior—of feelings and phrases with which these two poets attempted to ally heartfelt sentiment with classical diction. Even in the "Mæviad," when he rushes into sentimentality, he succeeds hardly better than Prior might have done with similar materials :—

How oft, O Dart ! what time the faithful pair
Walked forth, the fragrant hour of eve to share,
On thy romantic banks have my wild strains
(Not yet forgot amidst my native plains),
While thou hast sweetly gurgled down the vale,
Fill'd up the pause of love's delightful tale ;
While ever as she read, the conscious maid,
By faltering voice and downcast look betrayed,
Would blushing on her lover's neck recline,
And with her finger point the tenderest line.*

That Byron could regard such language as this with rapture, can only be accounted for by his reckless adulation of Pope.

Gifford was disqualified by habit, as well as by nature, from the rôle of a great satirist, who, while having a heart keenly sensitive to wrong, must have sufficient independence to hurl at the perpetrators of it, the lightnings of his indignation.

* See "Mæviad," pp. 194, 202.

Every chord of his heart must vibrate in unison with nature. Convention, and the victims of its artificial restraints, must arouse in him feelings akin to those felt by the knight-errants of old, when they beheld virtue suffering in the gripe of some savage monster of the woods, and rushed forward to imperil their heart's blood in its release. But all these were qualities which Gifford did not only want, but of which he had the very opposite. He entertained little respect for anything in the world but the artificial creations of rank and fashion. An author who had never been at either of the Universities, or who did not live in the vicinity of May Fair, could expect little mercy from Gifford, except, indeed, he had some peculiar claims upon his party. The writer who took his instructions from Pitt, as to the tenor of his next paper in the *Quarterly*, or of his next contribution to the *Anti-Jacobin*, who threw his shield over the worst errors of Lord Liverpool, or the wildest vagaries of Castlereagh, was not the man to array himself in the glittering armour of satire, and hew down in song the complicated blunders, vices, and follies he had defended in other spheres. To break a butterfly on a wheel, to expose a poetaster or some literary charlatan, to scalp a youthful genius of liberal tendencies who evinced talents which might, under proper encouragement, eclipse his own,—these were the things in which he shone, this constituted the petty sphere of his vocation.

His translations of Juvenal and Perseus, by which he is most known, after his "Baviad" and "Mæviad," are tame and insipid renderings of the originals, except where a jest or a repartee has to be given with force and propriety. The verse falls flat on the ear after the dashing couplets of Dryden. What he gains in correctness, he loses in force. To anglicise Juvenal required every quality which Gifford lacked most,—a mind replete with great fire and energy, a thorough disgust with the vices of the great, and a hearty sympathy with every kind of undeserved oppression. With Perseus he was far more at home. For the stoical poet resembled Gifford in his seeming indiffer-

ence to the mass of suffering which political misgovernment threw in his path, and in confining his satire to those obliquities whose exposure would do harm neither to his patrons nor himself. When, therefore, he applied his lash to the Della Cruscans, Gifford was in his element. Their offences were of that ridiculous character that only could be laughed out of fashion by quiet irony and by that airy banter of which Gifford was perfect master. Had the delinquents been of a graver sort,—had they been eccentric madmen like Charles of Sweden, or social monsters like Chatier,—Gifford's glittering weapon would have fared as ill in dealing with the subject as a fencing rapier in a broad-sword skirmish. When Byron called on the satirist to attack gigantic vice in high places, and make the

Guilty glare through future time,
Eternal beacons of consummate crime,*

he entirely miscalculated Gifford's powers. For it is one thing to demolish a school of wretched poetasters, and another to make

Bad men better, or at least ashamed.†

And when Gifford tried his hand at the latter, in his epistle to Wolcott, he resembled a child lifting a club he was unable to wield, and earned from his victim a sound horsewhipping. He mistook a string of vituperative abuse for those brilliant touches of satire which makes the spirituality of our common nature act as a foil to project into deeper blackness of guilt those vices which in the lowest or loftiest criminals overshadow its splendour. Gifford should have remembered that "monster of turpitude," "reptile gorged with bile," "ruffian," and other kindred terms, no more constituted satire than "crashing torrents," "petrifying suns," "hoar hills," and "glassy brooks" constituted pastoral poetry.

Perseus, on account of the limited range of his sympathies,

* "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers."

† *Ibid.*

as well as his want of force, is confessedly far below Juvenal; but Gifford had even a narrower range of mind than Perseus, though he seems to have been possessed of a tenderness to which the Roman stoic could lay no claim. He stands therefore in a more inferior relation to Dryden or Churchill than Perseus does to the great master of Roman satire; for Perseus, with all his deficiencies, was still original, whereas Gifford, like Pope and Johnson, cast the framework of his design in the mouldings of others. Yet even here he suffers by comparison, for Johnson and Pope had somewhat of the fire, the vigour, and the caustic irony of their masters. But in each of these qualities Perseus is singularly deficient, and his imitators are far more deficient than Perseus. The state of wretched dependence in which Gifford had been reared, his social thralldom in the Belgrave family, his disposition to wear the livery and perform the meanest offices of his party for daily bread, must have materially interfered with the development of any talents for satire, in the broad and unfettered arena upon which alone they can be cultivated with success. I cannot, then, do otherwise than place Gifford with Johnson among the second-class satirists; but while placing the sturdy Johnson among the first group in that class, I feel reluctantly compelled to consign Gifford, notwithstanding his Court buckles and Corinthian polish, to the last.

Rogers.

THERE is no poet of the nineteenth century whom criticism should delight to honour more than Rogers: a gentleman of blameless manners, of tender feelings, a princely Mæcenass of letters, a virtuoso of rare taste—possessing a keen sympathy with every institution calculated to promote the well-being of his fellow-creatures. But, I fear, the amiability of the man had largely to do with his defects as a poet. He could not feel, and, therefore, could not awaken, passion in others. He was deficient in that nervous sensibility, which, however morose it may make its victim occasionally appear, is a necessary ingredient in the production of any great work of art. Nor was he possessed of that frowning imagination which delights in the contemplation of the grand and the terrible, and which in so delighting withdraws its possessor from the sunny gaieties of the outer world. Rogers wanted force of nature and persistency of will. He was too weak and languid to exercise that concentrative energy which is required in the production of a great poem. He lived too constantly in the creations of others to flourish very much in his own. Hence he struck out no new line for himself. His “Ode to Superstition” is only a weak reflex of Gray; his short piece on Loch Long is an imitation of Wordsworth. In his “Epistle on Taste,” in his “Human Life,” and “Pleasures of Memory,” he follows Goldsmith; but he follows him with such success, that in some respects he may be said to have equalled his master. He, however, lacks his depth of feeling, and that vigour which occasionally rises into

sublimity. The rich banker had never competed with a clown, for the pennies of a gaping crowd, by standing upon his head ; he had never played a flageolet at a cottage door for a night's lodgings ; he had never looked down from the top of the Alps with blistered feet, and with such ravenous reflection as hungry solitude is calculated to inspire. His experience, therefore, of human suffering was as limited as his acquaintance with the grand and more abrupt features of Nature ; and what he could not realize perfectly to himself, he failed to impress upon others. It is very pleasant to be at the head of a large financial establishment ; to have an unlimited power of drawing cheques upon the house ; to never ride abroad except in luxurious carriages, with india-rubber springs ; to feel no want without having it promptly supplied ; but the atmosphere of beneficent indulgence is not that in which Genius moults her strongest pinions ; and the genius of Rogers was not of such high character as to neutralize, but rather to be impaired by, the disadvantages of his position. Goldsmith could paint from actual experience, familiar as he was with every phase of existence, while Rogers contemplated the most exciting scenes of life, tapestried as in a loom, and then only from the wrong side of the arras.

It has appeared a marvel to some that Rogers, having produced the "Pleasures of Memory" at the outset of his career, did not produce something greater to fulfil the rich promise he thus gave of a splendid maturity. But, I think, the wonder ought to be, not that he failed to produce anything greater, but that he ever produced anything so good. In the best of his descriptions he never presents anything in a new light ; he never scales the heights of genuine sublimity ; he never wounds the soul with deep emotions of pity, or intoxicates it with the delights of love. In his episode of "Julia and Florio," as in his stories of "Jacqueline" and "Columbus," he had a wide field for the construction of plot and the delineation of individual character, but he can hardly be said to attempt the one, as he certainly makes a

very faint exhibition of the other. He never startles his reader with any bold reflections. He leaves life, with its mysteries, its problems, and its perplexing enigmas, just where he found it. The whole of his talent consists in recalling, by vivid touches, all those sunnier scenes of existence in which the heart is most interested, and over which Fancy loves most to brood. Summoned by his magic pencil, the most charming recollections of the poet troop in palpable array before us, and the mind recurs to them as to a series of pictures interwoven with its own sensations, the fidelity of which has all the stamp of truth. But this talent was not capable of much expansion or variation. Its range was limited; it could not be said to grow. And hence Rogers' genius was like the acacia, which bears a profusion of blossom but no fruit.

In the "Pleasures of Memory" Rogers was singularly happy in the choice of a subject which just suited the range of his powers; and it cannot be denied that, with the exception of the wretched episode in the second part, his treatment of it would have done justice to an artist of even greater abilities. To a comprehensive grasp of the subject, he unites skilful delineation of parts and elaborate finish of the minuter points of detail more perfectly than has been accomplished in any other poem of similar compass. He not only invests these recollections with the freshest colours, which time has obscured, but which fancy has endeared to most of us; but he selects from a wide range of extraneous objects those scenes illustrative of his subject which are most calculated to awaken the purest sympathies of our nature. Whether he portrays the dove flying homeward to the famished garrison, with its message of deliverance tied under its wing, only to be devoured by those to whom it brings unexpected tidings of relief; or the nun in her convent gloom recalling the dearest blandishments of the world she has forsworn; or the Swiss peasant journeying over the Alps, with the storm-cloud under his feet and the prattle of his babes haunting his ear across the roar of the waterfall;—the

sketch is drawn with a simplicity and a natural truthfulness which must always enchant the mind :—

The beauteous maid, who bids the world adieu,
Oft of that world will snatch a fond review ;
Oft at the shrine neglect her beads, to trace
Some social scene, some dear, familiar face :
And ere, with iron tongue, the vesper bell
Bursts thro' the cypress walk, the convent cell,
Oft will her warm and wayward heart revive,
To love and joy still tremblingly alive ;
The whispered vow, the chaste caress prolong,
Weave the light dance, and swell the choral song ;
With rapt ear drink the enchanting serenade,
And, as it melts along the moonlight glade,
To each soft note returns as soft a sigh,
And bless the youth that bids her slumbers fly.

The itinerant Savoyard leaving his native mountains is no less forcibly presented to us :—

Where the blithe son of Savoy, journeying round
With humble wares and pipe of merry sound,
From his green vale and sheltered cabin hies,
And scales the Alps to visit foreign skies ;
Tho' far below the forkèd lightnings play,
And at his feet the thunders die away,
Oft, in the saddle rudely rocked to sleep,
While his mule browses on the dizzy steep,
With *Memory's* aid, he sits at home, and sees
His children sport beneath their native trees,
And bends to hear their cherub-voices call,
O'er the loud fury of the torrent's fall.

Even when he describes some abstract operation of memory, he borrows his illustration from attachments, having indeed little, if any, relation with the subject, but which are calculated to touch a sympathetic chord in the dullest breast :—

Ah ! who can tell the triumphs of the mind,
By truth illumined and by taste refined ?

When age has quenched the eye, and closed the ear,
Still nerved for action in her native sphere,
Oft will she rise, with searching glance pursue
Some long-loved image vanished from her view ;
Dart thro' the deep recesses of the past,
O'er dusky forms in chains of slumber cast,
With giant-grasp fling back the folds of night,
And snatch the faithless fugitive to light.
So thro' the grove the impatient mother flies,
Each sunless glade, each secret pathway tries ;
Till the thin leaves the truant boy disclose,
Long on the wood-moss stretched in sweet repose.

I readily allow that these descriptions do not belong to a very high order of art, that they suggest too many comparisons with Goldsmith, that they only present the most glaring and most easily to be pourtrayed examples of his subjects ; still they have the rare merit of going directly to the heart, and of engaging it to take a lively interest in the simplest objects, unadorned with any tints except those reflected from nature. The charm of material delineation is striking in itself, but this is only made the medium of reflecting back on the soul the sunniest associations of its own existence, sometimes with double force, as mirrored in the experience of others. Rogers had a genuine love for the artistic phase of every sort of existence. Nothing seemed to interest him till it was invested with that colouring which made the object rather a spiritual embodiment than a material picture ; but that spiritual embodiment was not derived from the lofty nature of ideal conception, but from the quieter affections of the human breast. As such, he is entitled to a place in the same division of poets as Goldsmith ; but from his want of imaginative conception, from the predominance of mere fancy in his works, rather combining the thoughts of others than originating any of his own, his position will naturally fall among the lowest group.

Though Rogers came before the world on five different occasions after his "Pleasures of Memory," to challenge attention for

his muse, it was rather to decrease than enhance his reputation. Indeed, his *début* and exit as an author were alike fatal. His "Ode to Superstition" requires a painful effort to read. His "Italy" few would dream of opening, were it not for the divine etchings of Stothard and Turner. In his "Epistle on Taste," published in 1796, and in his "Human Life," written twenty-three years afterwards, we find something like the same vigour as in his great poem; but the public expected to encounter greater beauties; and when they discovered he had hardly equalled, the intensity of their disappointment led them to believe he had fallen far below, his previous effort. But these two poems evince great merit, simply because the author confines himself within the limited range of his powers, and does not break away from the ground which he occupies with such force in his "Pleasures of Memory." Indeed, these two poems would require very little adaptation to fit into the framework of their predecessor. In that on "Human Life," we get hardly anything else than a succession of pictures illustrating the various affections as imaged in the different stages of being which impart to them vitality. He throws no light on the grand problems of existence. On one occasion only does he become psychological, and then merely to dish up a hackneyed argument for the immortality of the soul:—

Do what he will, man cannot realize
Half he conceives—the glorious vision flies.
Go where he may, he cannot hope to find
The truth, the beauty pictured in the mind.
But if, by chance, an object strike the sense,
The faintest shadow of that excellence,
Passions, that slept, are stirring in his frame;
Thoughts undefined, feelings without a name;
And some, not here called forth, may slumber on,
Till this vain pageant of a world is gone;
Lying too deep for things that perish here,
Waiting for life,—but in a nobler sphere.

The picture of the true wife, drawn with more completeness

and originality, furnishes a contrast to the mere woman of fashion, in his Epilogue for Mrs. Siddons :—

His house she enters, there to be a light,
Shining within, when all without is night ;
A guardian angel o'er his life presiding,
Doubling his pleasures, and his cares dividing ;
Winning him back, when mingling in the throng,
From a vain world we love, alas ! too long,
To fireside happiness and hours of ease,
Blest with that charm, the certainty to please.
How oft her eyes read his ; her gentle mind
To all his wishes, all his thoughts inclined ;
Still subject, ever on the watch to borrow
Mirth of his mirth, and sorrow of his sorrow.
The soul of music slumbers in the shell,
Till waked and kindled by the master's spell ;
And feeling hearts—touch them but rightly—pour
A thousand melodies unheard before !

Though this is genuine poetry, it is not of a high class ; but Rogers falls miserably below this standard when he has to describe scenes in which deep passion ought to be evoked. The weak lines exemplifying filial affection in the meeting of Mary Roper with her venerable father on his way to the scaffold, are ill redeemed by such verses as the following, even had they the poor merit of originality :—

To her, methinks a second youth is given,
The light upon her face is light from heaven !
An hour like this is worth a thousand passed
In pomp or ease. 'Tis present to the last ;—
Years glide away untold : 'tis still the same.

In the psychological argument the execution is better than the conception ; but in the following the conception is better than the execution :—

Through the wide world he only is alone
Who lives not for another. Come what will,
The generous man has his companion still :

* * * * *

Even in an iron cage condemned to dwell,
The cage that stands within his dungeon cell,
He feeds his spider—happier at the worst
Than he at large who in himself is curst !

It is only when the poet resumes his old task of portraying the sunnier aspects of humanity that vigour of thought is united with charm of expression, as in his picture of a mother fondling her baby-boy :—

As with soft accents round her neck he clings,
And cheek to cheek her soothing song she sings,
How blest to feel the beatings of his heart !
Breathe his sweet breath, and kiss for kiss impart ;
Watch o'er his slumbers like the brooding dove,
And, if she can, exhaust a mother's love !

The "Epistle on Taste," though a far more unique production, does not increase our admiration of the poet to anything like the same degree as it raises our estimation of the man. Its principal charm consists in the combination of two contrasts—that of the lettered ease and rustic enjoyments of a country villa with the bustling importunities of civic strife, in which, indeed, the poet had his model in Horace ; and the other of artistic refinement and æsthetic luxury, rather heightened than impaired by the humble resources of cottage life, which, while it serves to set them off as a foil, imparts to them a zest they would not otherwise possess. Here the poet had no model at all but that supplied by his own good nature, which loved to place itself in a position attainable by most of his fellow-creatures, in order to show them that the most refined pleasures were not the appanage merely of the wealthy, but were like light, ready if not intercepted by the cloud of ignorance, to pour their sunshine on the multitude. With this design the poet lets us peep into his bath, his bedroom, and his study, each, though humble in themselves, embellished with appropriate pictures, which breathe a soul into the silent walls, and with busts which exhibit in their features all the noblest

thoughts of the characters they represent. But these ornaments, not being originals, are inexpensive ; for the poet, instead of littering his rooms with the works of inferior artists, prefers to surround himself with cheap copies of the best masters. By this means the poet enforces the doctrine, which derives double force from the advocacy of a millionaire, that the perfection of taste consists in producing the greatest effects by the smallest means :—

Be mine to bless the more mechanic skill,
That stamps, renews, and multiplies at will ;
And cheaply circulates thro' distant climes,
The fairest relics of the purest times.
Here from the mould to conscious being start
Those finer forms, the miracles of art ;
Here chosen gems, imprest on sulphur, shine,
That slept for sages in a second mine ;
And here the faithful graver dares to trace
A Michael's grandeur and a Raphael's grace !
Thy gallery, Florence, gilds my humble walls,
And my low roof the Vatican recalls !

* * * * *

Tho' my thatch'd bath no rich mosaic knows,
A limpid spring with unfelt current flows.
Emblem of life ! which, still as we survey,
Seems motionless, yet ever glides away ;
The shadowy walls record, with Attic art,
The strength and beauty which its waves impart.
Here Thetis, bending, with a mother's fears,
Dips her dear boy, whose pride restrains his tears ;
There Venus, rising, shrinks with sweet surprise,
As her fair self reflected seems to rise !

The contrast between the pleasures which the poet enjoys in this remote retreat and the bustling importunities of town life, if not brought out with the bold outline and caustic irony of Horace, it is because the silkiness of the poet's nature leads him to avoid the more striking for the quieter lights and shades of the picture :—

Far from the joyless glare, the maddening strife,
And all the dull impertinence of life,
These eyelids open to the rising ray,
And close, when nature bids, at close of day.
Here, at the dawn, the kindling landscape glows ;
There, noonday levees call from faint repose.
Here, the flushed wave flings back the parting light ;
There, glimmering lamps anticipate the night.

Rogers thus sketches himself in the fields :—

When Spring bursts forth in blossoms thro' the vale,
And her wild music triumphs on the gale,
Oft with my book I muse from stile to stile ;
Oft in my porch the listless noon beguile,
Training loose numbers, till declining day,
Thro' the green trellis shoots a crimson ray ;
Till the west-wind leads on the twilight hours,
And shakes the fragrant bells of closing flowers.

With his own quiet pursuits, the author contrasts those of the furred beauty who comes emblazoned with her jewels to startle midnight in Grosvenor Square :—

There let her strike with momentary ray,
As tapers shine their little lives away ;
There let her practise from herself to steal,
And look the happiness she does not feel ;
The ready smile and bidden blush employ,
At Faro routs, that dazzle to destroy ;
Fan with affected ease the essenced air,
And lisp of fashions with unmeaning stare :
Be thine to meditate an humbler flight,
When morning fills the fields with rosy light ;
Be thine to blend, without one vulgar aim,
Repose with dignity ; with quiet, fame.

But these by no means present the most startling contrasts which his subject placed within his reach, and which the poet judiciously avoided from his want of sustained force and vigour. Even the sketches he presents in "The Epistle" lack completeness, while those in the poem on human life, though more

finished, are arranged without order, as they group themselves in the poet's fancy, without reference to any philosophical principle whatever. These poems, therefore, only confirm the estimate already formed of Rogers' powers, as one possessing all the catholic tenderness of Goldsmith, without his vigour, and Cowper's keen perception of natural beauties, without his felicity of expression. But these qualities were materially enhanced by æsthetic culture and a world-embracing circle of heartfelt sympathies, equally beyond both. It is these sympathies which ennoble the humblest of his performances, and which will obtain for him readers when the works of some of the more ostentatious of his contemporaries are neglected.

Of the minor pieces of Rogers, with the exception of "Loch Long," one or two short ditties, and the charming Epilogue, in which he dashes off with great spirit the five stages in the life of a woman of fashion, I can only say it would have been much better had they not been written ; or, if written, that they had not been flouted in the face of posterity. There is, however, among them, a sonnet to the torso of Hercules, which, in the gardens of the Vatican, had often caught the admiring gaze of Michael Angelo, Raphael, and the two Caracci, and which in turn was destined to inspire the English poet with the noblest lines he ever wrote :—

And dost thou still, thou mass of breathing stone
(Thy giant limbs to night and chaos hurled),
Still sit as on the fragment of a world ;
Surviving all, majestic and alone ?
What tho' the spirits of the North, that swept
Rome from the earth, when in her pomp she slept,
Smote thee with fury ; and thy headless trunk
Deep in the dust 'mid tower and temple sunk ;
Soon to subdue mankind 'twas thine to rise
Still, still unquelled thy glorious energies !
Aspiring minds, with thee conversing, caught
Bright revelations of the good they sought ;
By thee that long-lost spell, in secret given,
To draw down gods, and lift the soul to heaven !

Campbell.

THE chief of the classical poets of the present century is Campbell; and, judging from the manner in which this school has so completely died out, his sovereignty over it, is not likely to be disturbed during the present generation. But his own pre-eminence is so great, that even were the school in fashion, rivalry, during the next thirty years, would be a thing almost impossible: for poets with the impassioned stateliness of Gray, or with the deep plaintiveness of Collins, seldom appear even once in a century. But how much rarer must the appearance of those be who combine, to a large extent, the excellences of both? Such was Campbell, who has all Gray's merits, allied to as much of Collins's exquisite pathos as can be detached from spiritual forms and wedded to earthly objects. Campbell's fire and energy raise him above Gray, but his lack of ideality places him below Collins. He has, however, the advantage of being more varied in style, of choosing his subjects from a wider range of objects, and of displaying keener sympathies for his fellow-men than either. A Greek reticence of language, exuberance of classical imagery, ornate diction so exquisitely polished as to make each word shed a diamond lustre over the thought, equally characterise the three poets. In Collins, however, this glittering raiment seems the natural expression of his mind, fitting it as closely and tightly as a skin. But in Campbell, as in Gray, the labour of the artist is visible in the artificial construction of phrase which occasionally diverts attention from the thoughts to the words in which they are expressed—a defect

so much the more serious, because it inverts the functions of language, which ought, like light, to remain hidden while revealing everything else with which it is brought into contact.

It is this fastidiousness with respect to style that constitutes Campbell's peculiar glory and weakness. All his pieces display perfect elaboration of finish ; but he appears to have sacrificed everything else to obtain it. In his longer poems, the action is as much neglected as the style is polished. Impoverished conception of plan is united with faultless execution of details. There is, however, one advantage arising out of Campbell's fastidiousness, that his pages are perfectly free from what is called waste writing. This is most evident in his lesser poems, hardly a line of which occurs without some beauty. If a stanza did not please him, he drew his pen across it without the slightest remorse, as I have seen Herbert put his knife through a picture which would have made the fortune of many a younger artist. In this respect Campbell stands out in pleasing contrast to Wordsworth and Southey. If any of their compositions were unsatisfactory, their only resource was to add as many dozen lines more to the peccant part with a view to conceal, if they failed to enliven, its dullness. But Campbell resolutely applied the incision knife, and if the vital organism of the piece was injured thereby, threw the whole away. Wordsworth and Southey most piously treasured up every verse which they composed. But Campbell had a most provoking habit of tearing up nearly everything he wrote, and scattering the fragments of paper out of his study window ; whence it came to pass, when the wind blew in one direction, that the cabbages and gooseberry-bushes of his neighbour's garden at Sydenham looked in the dog-days very much as if a theatrical snow-storm had burst over them. The result of this is, that Campbell is now seldom read except as a whole, Wordsworth only in parts, and Southey not at all.

The "Pleasures of Hope" displays all the ardour and impetuosity of youthful genius blended with those faults to which most

young writers are liable, of caring much more for sound than sense, and cumbering immature designs with profusion of florid ornaments. The description of the shipwreck is powerfully given. The "Siege of Warsaw" still retains its place as the first battle-piece in the language, with that powerful shriek which is destined to vibrate through the hearts of patriots for all time. But the effects of hope upon the imagination, and the aspirations of genius, as indeed all that portion of the poem which required calm philosophical treatment, are inadequately portrayed. It is on this account that Rogers' "Memory" satisfies the judgment more ; for though immeasurably Campbell's inferior in wielding the lightnings of passion, Rogers evinces far greater skill in metaphysical analysis. His transitions are more distinct, and he passes with greater ease from one topic to another ; whereas in Campbell the transitions are unnatural, and their stiffly artificial character does not always prevent the subjects from running into each other. In Rogers, the language is invariably suited to the thought. But with Campbell it not unfrequently happens, that in proportion to the weakness of the thought, the strength of the language becomes apparent, until we are reminded of the pale, consumptive figure of Ruthven, in Maclise's picture, trying to stand erect beneath the suit of heavy-mailed armour which is dragging him to the ground. This blending of two incongruous elements produces in Campbell a similar effort to appear stronger than he really is, and to make up for internal stamina by grinding of the teeth and other spasmodic exhibitions of muscular violence. But as a work of genius, defective as it is in parts, yet grand in its irregularities, the poem of Rogers must yield the palm to Campbell's, who, in this the greenest of his productions, soars far higher than his contemporary ever did in the full maturity of his powers.

From the persistent manner in which the author's name was coupled with the "Pleasures of Hope," it might be thought the author set more value on this poem than on anything else he had ever written. But Campbell's taste was too exquisite to allow

him to entertain any such conceit. On the contrary, it was one of the standing annoyances of his life that he should be only known by a performance which evinced all the crudeness and immaturity of youthful genius. But his hatred of the practice could not put it down. Whenever a paper chronicled his arrival in a foreign town, it was always Mr. Campbell, the author of the "*Pleasures of Hope*." When he was introduced at Court, it was as the author of the "*Pleasures of Hope*." He was hardly ever pointed out in street, or assembly, without the same startling sound, the author of the "*Pleasures of Hope*." If any toast was coupled with his name at a convivial meeting, down came the fatal affix in defiance of the protestations of the author. Campbell struggled against his destiny in vain. The book-trade would not advertise his poems without the same magic title. As in life, so it was in death. When his coffin was lowered into the vault at Westminster Abbey, the plate was found to contain the inscription, "Thomas Campbell, author of the '*Pleasures of Hope*.'" And no sooner was the stone laid over the grave than the attention of the reader was arrested by the same ominous words, coupling his names by iron links with that production for all future generations.

Campbell always avoided lengthy subjects, which is a sign that he mistrusted his powers. None of his pieces evince much skill, either in delineation of character or construction of plot. His "*Gertrude of Wyoming*" and "*O'Conner's Child*" are too short for that purpose. His "*Theodoric*" is so far below him, that it ought never to have been printed. To call the "*Pilgrim of Glencoe*" a narrative poem would be absurd. The "*Pleasures of Hope*," so far as it does not evade analysis, is only a succession of pictures, "like pearls upon a thread at random strung," having no connection beyond the feeling of expectancy which this gay deceiver awakes in the human breast. Ideality, or that quality which invests the universe with ethereal splendour, to which its own sunshine is but a shadow, is not in his works pro-

minently conspicuous. Part of the scenery of "Wyoming" is drawn with a magical pencil:—

A valley from the river shore withdrawn,
Was Albert's home, two quiet woods between,
Whose lofty verdure overlook'd his lawn ;
And waters to their resting-place serene
Came fresh'ning, and reflecting all the scene :
(A mirror in the depth of flowery shelves :)
So sweet a spot of earth, you might, I ween,
Have guess'd some congregation of the elves,
To sport by summer moons, had shaped it for themselves.*

But we generally find the colouring in the quiet parts of the poem is not sustained, and that the effect is owing to a few fairy tints artistically introduced to brighten up much that is commonplace, rather than to the overflowing prodigality of a gorgeous imagination. These gems stand out more or less isolated, so that the stanzas appear to have been framed as a foil to set off their beauty rather than to carry forward the action of the poem. How tame would be the description of Gertrude hastening home at early morn, were it not for the line,

While yet the wild deer trod in spangling dew,†

or of Gertrude herself, were it not for the sunniness of her eyes, in which

Their ninth blue summer shone,‡

and

Which seemed to love whate'er they looked upon ;§

or for the picture of the white boy led by the swarthy Indian, were it not for the simile comparing him to morning brought by night. The reader's taste is rather sharpened than gratified by beauties of this character, which are no sooner introduced than they are lost in the dreariness of commonplace, leaving behind a vain regret that such magic tints should be so transitory, like the gleams of light which are swallowed up by

* Part 2, st. i. † Part 2, st. viii. ‡ Part I, st. xii. § Part 2, st. iv.

April clouds as soon as they appear, or the perfumes from a tuft of March violets, which no sooner hit the sense than they are carried off by the wind in an opposite direction.

These spiritual touches are more apt to stamp the mind's features, than those of a material landscape, on his pages, and accordingly Campbell is more effective in his characters than in his scenery. The countenance of Albert is well shaded :—

And though amidst the calm of thought entire,
Some high and haughty features might betray
A soul impetuous once, 'twas earthly fire
That fled composure's intellectual ray,
As *Ætna's* fires grow dim before the rising day.*

He said—and strain'd unto his heart the boy :
Far differently the mute *Oneida* took
His calumet of peace, and cup of joy ;
As monumental bronze unchanged his look ;
A soul that pity touch'd, but never shook :
Train'd from his tree-rock'd cradle to his bier
The fierce extremes of good and ill to brook
Impassive—fearing but the shame of fear—
A stoic of the woods—a man without a tear.†

But these portraits, while they present the type of a class, lack the features of an individual, and the incidents with which the originals are brought into contact too unfavourably remind us of others to which they are inferior. The character of *Oneida* is not anything like so minutely developed as that of *Chactas*, from which it is taken, though his physiognomy possesses qualities more frank and local than *Atala's* lover, because *Oneida* had not been half civilized by contact with the inhabitants of Europe. The infancy and love of *Waldgrave* and *Gertrude* too much remind us of the exquisite group of *Paul* and *Virginia* ; but Campbell has made no more than a sketch of a subject which in the hands of *Bernardin de St. Pierre* comprises a finished picture.

It would, however, be unjust to Campbell to leave the reader

* Part i., st. viii.

† Part i., st. xxiii.

without the impression that, wherever his subject admitted of it, he could attain the sublime without effort. In the lower region of ideality he seems to have trod with the fear of the critics before his eyes, but in the upper, he seems to have forgotten that such beings were in existence. Though his imaginative flights are not frequent, he maintains himself in the loftiest sphere of sublimity with the same ease and dignity as if it were his natural home. The immensity of the ocean is nowhere so adequately imaged as by representing it as a mirror wherein all the stars can see themselves at once, or as that element by which our earth, otherwise opaque, is rendered luminous to distant orbs. And again :

Earth has not a plain
So boundless or so beautiful as thine :
The eagle's vision cannot take it in ;
The lightning's wing, too weak to sweep its space,
Sinks half way o'er it, like a wearied bird.

The lordliest floods
And cataracts are drops of dew
To thee, that couldst subdue the earth itself,
And brook'st commandment from the heavens alone
In marshalling thy waves.

But it is in his address to the dead eagle that Campbell rises to the elevation of his subject, and makes us regret that his desire of disarming criticism by faultless execution should have deterred him from selecting a theme which would have given wider range to his great powers. With what majesty he invests his subject :—

Fallen as he is, this king of birds still seems
Like royalty in ruins. Though his eyes
Are shut, that looked undazzled in the sun,
He was the sultan of the sky, and earth
Paid tribute to his eyry. It was perch'd
Higher than human conqueror ever built
His banner'd fort. Where Atlas' top looks o'er
Sahara's desert to the Equator's line ;

From thence the winged despot marked his prey,
 Above the encampments of the Bedouins, ere
 Their watch-fires were extinct, or camels knelt
 To take their loads, or horsemen scoured the plain ;
 And there he dried his feathers in the dawn,
 Whilst yet the unwakened world was dark below.

The aeronaut drifts, in his silken vehicle,

The passive plaything of the winds. Not such
 Was this proud bird : he clove the adverse storm,
 And cuffed it with his wings. He stopped his flight
 As easily as the Arab reins his steed,
 And stood at pleasure 'neath Heaven's zenith, like
 A lamp suspended from its azure dome.
 Whilst underneath him the world's mountains lay
 Like molehills, and her streams like lucid threads ;
 Then downwards, faster than a falling star,
 He neared the earth, until his shape distinct
 Was blackly shadowed on the sunny ground ;
 And deeper terror hushed the wilderness
 To hear his nearer whoop.

* * * * *

His bright eyes were his compass, earth his chart,
 His talons anchor'd on the stormiest cliff,
 And on the very lighthouse-rock he perched
 When winds churned white the waves.

"The Last Man" we need not quote, as it is in everybody's memory. For instances of the sublime called up by a few graphic touches, it is perhaps unequalled in any language. But these efforts, great as they are, on account of their short and fragmentary character, do not constitute anything like the substance of those claims to distinction on which this poet's reputation rests.

In what, then, does Campbell's greatness consist, since he holds a place in our literature, both lofty and unique, which could not be filled up with any other bust than his own? It is undoubtedly in his command over the feelings, in his exquisite pathos, in his power to stir the breast with martial ardour as with

a trumpet, in the soft emotions he conjures up in his bowers of love, and the red glare he throws over his battle-fields. But Campbell rarely paints love except in contact with death, when it assumes hues which speak to us of heaven. It is not over Armida in her paradisaal gardens, the representative of voluptuousness, but over Waldgrave in the lifeless arms of Gertrude, or the young wife bending over the corpse of her bleeding Hussar, that Campbell loves to linger; and in scenes of this character it must be confessed he has no master. The sailor ploughing the billowy wave, or the soldier keeping watch "with the sentinel stars in the sky," have no more faithful delineator of their hopes and their fears, their anxious home-yearnings, and the terrible depths of that love which increases in proportion to the distance of its object, than Campbell. The passion he loves to portray is not that which satisfies the cravings of the senses, but that which spiritualizes our nature by attuning all its chords to pity. The scenes of the Napoleonic campaigns, echoing their thunders daily in his ears, appear to have haunted his imagination, and enabled him to reproduce with tenfold force all the engines of human butchery which ingenuity could devise, in contrast with the softest emotions of the human heart. I know not whether his genius is more evinced in these contrasts, than in the description of the battle itself. His rapid transitions, the quickness with which he hurries us along, recalls the sudden evolutions of troops; his terse imagery illuminating everything on which it falls, the concentrative flash of lightning, and his sonorous periods, those volleyed peals of thunder with which the artillery of his combatants at intervals tears the heavens. The awful stillness at the close which curtains the dismal havoc, or that unquenchable thirst for freedom, which turns the blood-besprinkled dust of the patriot's death-bed into a couch of glory, is given with a fidelity seldom equalled in poetry, and certainly never surpassed. Let the reader compare the "Battle of Hohenlinden," or the "Death-struggle at Warsaw," with Montgomery's "Alex-

andria," or Scott's "Waterloo," and he will be startled at the difference between the diffusiveness of mere poetic ability and the vigorous strength of genius. It is on account of this fire and energy, enveloped, as it occasionally is in his lyrics, in the silken veil of plaintiveness, and always expressed in the choicest language, that Campbell is entitled to a place in the second division of poets. I do not know that anybody would dispute his claim to being the first martial lyric poet of his country. Had Burns cultivated this vein more than he did, he would have been obliged, though in other respects his master, in this field at least, to yield precedence to his countryman. Campbell has a distinct speciality as the Tyrtæus of modern England. The keen sympathy which he always felt for the oppressed in every part of the world, the ardour with which his soul always glowed for freedom, imparted a vital intensity to those strains which may fairly challenge for him the proud title of the Bard of National Independence.

Walter Savage Landor.

LANDOR was a man of crotchety nature, of liberal but capricious sympathies. His feelings, though deep and capable of great expansion, were never under the control of a comprehensive intellect. He saw into the heart of nothing. He seems to have been born with a mind blurred over with ingrained prejudices, from which he could no more escape than from his own identity. As such, he would have furnished a very good exemplification of Descartes' doctrine of innate ideas. He also manifested from his cradle upwards a certain querulousness, which made him in youth quarrel with his tutors, in middle life with his tenants and his country, and in old age with his wife and himself. Hence, poor Landor, though blessed with robust health, and with all the luxuries that can make health enjoyable, had a sad time of it during his protracted sojourn amongst us. His life was little better than a battle and a march. He early left England for France, under the impression that its laws afforded no shelter for an honest man; but tired of France, he tried Italy. After a migratory sojourn in Italy, he came back to England, which he forsook for Italy again. Other poets have been buffeted about by the restless tide of necessity, but Landor's wanderings had no assignable cause but caprice. He appears to have thoroughly understood nobody, and nobody appears to have thoroughly understood him. His heart was not selfish, nor his temperament hypochondriacal. But he had certain abstract notions of right and wrong which he persisted in carrying out, totally regardless of the actual fitness

of things, or the social framework into which he was born. In the same manner, he had certain antique notions of art which he persisted in embodying in his works, without wasting a thought upon the suitability of such notions to the requirements of modern civilization. Hence, Landor, with a hand always ready to defend, and a purse always open to assist, the helpless, was the most unpopular man of his day; and with invention and imagination of no mean order, his poems were even less appreciated than himself.

The mind of Landor was cast in a mould essentially antique. He belonged more to the Rome of Camillus than to any other era of recorded time; for his habits were simple, his hatred of kings intense, his study of Greek models incessant. The Latin language was as familiar to him as his own, and had his preference not been interfered with, he would have chosen it as the vehicle of his thoughts to the world. As it is, many of his shorter pieces are written in Latin, which he thought was destined to replace the modern jargons of Europe. The Gothic element, out of which they had arisen, was to Landor essentially barbarous; and nothing like correct taste, until that element was eliminated, could be established among mankind. Hence, such of his pieces as are not Latin, or, like his Hellenics, direct translations from his Latin poems, wear a certain staid classical air, just as if Valerius Flaccus had discarded the toga and popped upon us in an English frock-coat and tight waistcoat. There is, in his pages, an absence of genuine bursts of feeling, a statuesque immobility, a serene chilliness, and an utter want of interest to support the reader in deciphering the meaning which constantly eludes his grasp. Yet Wordsworth declared he would sooner be the author of Landor's poems than of any other which had appeared during his time, and Southey averred that Landor nearly rivalled Milton. If Wordsworth was sincere, he was most inconsistent; for no poet so violently transgressed every precept of the Wordsworthian theory as Landor. But Southey's praise came direct from the heart.

The opinion he expressed was the quintessence of candour and folly.

The connection between Southey and Landor constitutes one of the curiosities of literature. The temperaments of the two men were as conflicting as their principles, and their habits as antithetical as either; yet the extraordinary relish which both manifested for each other's poems became the foundation of a life-enduring friendship. It mattered little to Southey that Landor was a deist in religion, a republican in politics, the lampooner of his patrons, the defender of measures which Southey believed to be destructive of public morality,—Landor was the author of "*Gebir*" and "*Julian*," and as such entitled to the first place in his bosom. It mattered little to Landor that Southey was a bigoted Tory, a red-hot Churchman, the unflinching apostle of every doctrine he loathed, and the stout panegyrist of the men whom he abhorred,—Southey was the author of "*Madoc*," and therefore entitled to Landor's most cherished affection. By mutual gratulation they persuaded each other to persist in a course which rendered success impossible. Had not Landor volunteered to print Southey's poems at his own expense, his epical career would have been cut short with "*Madoc*." Had not Southey interposed to find a publisher for "*Julian*," Landor would have had to consult the taste of his epoch, or to abandon Parnassus. The fascination which Landor's poems had for Southey was hardly surpassed by the fascination which Southey's poems had for Landor. To some extent they bore a family likeness, and each, therefore, in praising the other was only justifying himself. Both were about the same remove from mediocrity; both constructed their works upon principles which completely override the genuine impulses of nature, and both sought to make up for their lack of dramatic interest, the one by statuesque embodiments of passion, the other by gorgeous scenic descriptions. Both in their poetical capacity failed to interest the age, and both thought that this was their highest badge of merit. It was this identity of the

poetical situation which bridged over the gulf which separated their political and religious life, and made two individuals bristling with antagonisms, the staunchest associates and friends. So great is the cementing influence of disappointed ambitions !

“Gebir,” which always possessed extraordinary fascination for Southey, may be said to be the first piece Landor wrote of any significance. The moral of the story consists in showing how far more sensible and felicitous is a life devoted to the pursuits of love and peace than to those of war and ambition. The hero is king of Gibraltar, who, on some miserable pretence of requiting Egypt for sheltering the enemies of his ancestors, invades that country at the head of ten thousand men. But Charoba, the young Egyptian queen, instead of fighting her assailant, is impelled by her confidant, Dalica, to come to some amicable adjustment with Gebir. The two monarchs very naturally fall in love with each other as soon as they meet. But very unnaturally, Dalica, mistaking her mistress’s emotions of love for ebullitions of anger, proceeds to consult her witch-sister, Myrthir, as to the best means of extricating Charoba from her embarrassing position. These two people enweave a poisonous robe, which, like the shirt of Nessus, was destined to make very short work of the life of the wearer. But, before Gebir is presented with this bridal garment of death, the reader, on the morning of the day, gets a charming glimpse of Charoba at her morning ablutions :—

Next to her chamber, closed by cedar doors,
A bath of purest marble, purest wave,
On its fair surface bore its pavement high :
Arabian gold enchased the crystal roof,
With fluttering boys adorn’d, and girls unrobed ;
These when you touch the quiet water, start
From their aërial sunny arch, and pant
Entangled ’mid each other’s flowery wreaths,
And each pursuing is in turn pursued.
Here came * * * * *
Charoba : long she lingered at the brink ;
Often she sighed ; and, naked as she was,

Sat down, and leaning on the couch's edge,
On the soft inward pillow of her arm
Rested her burning cheek : she moved her eyes ;
She blush'd ; and, blushing, plunged into the wave.*

Arrayed in costly jewels, the queen unwittingly proceeds to invest Gebir, as he sits enthroned, with the envenomed robe, at a festal gathering of the two nations. Her lover's first pallor, Charoba mistakes for the influences of love, when, to her horror, he expires in agonies of pain, and the two nations, recently reconciled by the alliance between their youthful monarchs, start asunder crowned with the garlands and in the midst of the festivity intended to consummate their union.

This is the main trunk of the story. But there are two episodes intertwined with it which bring out the opposite side of the contrast. Gebir has a brother engaged in the quiet pursuits of shepherd life. This brother captivates a sea-nymph, who reveals her fondness for him by inviting him to a wrestling-match, in which she proves the victor. The nymph, however, acted with an astuteness hardly to be reconciled with deep affection. For, knowing her power, she allows Tamar to risk one of his sheep as his prize in the contest, against which she has nothing to wager but articles of no appreciable value to a seaside shepherd :—

But I have sinuous shells of pearly hue
Within, and they that lustre have imbibed
In the sun's palace porch, where, when unyoked,
His chariot-wheel stands midway in the wave :
Shake one, and it awakens ; then apply
Its polish'd lips to your attentive ear,
And it remembers its august abodes,
And murmurs as the ocean murmurs there.†

But the nymph, after prostrating her beloved, very selfishly runs off with his sheep, and leaves Tamar gazing after her in very vacant fashion :—

* Book vii., ls. 81—95.

† Book i., ls. 159—66.

Restless, then ran I to the highest ground,
To watch her ; she was gone, gone down the tide,
And the long moonbeam on the hard wet sand,
Lay like a jasper column half upreared.*

It is this considerate nymph whom Gebir resolves to consult, that he may baffle the demoniac powers in Egypt, who have razed to the foundations a city which, at the desire of Charoba, he has been vainly endeavouring to build up. By her instructions, he performs certain rites at the place where his half-erected city disappeared, when the earth opens, and Gebir, descending into a yawning chasm, finds himself at once confronted by the spirits who have served their time out in the flesh, and with a crowd of others who are waiting to take their turn on the stage of the future. At the entrance he meets Aroar, a weird personage, who is neither alive or dead, but who contrives to amuse himself with politics, and very obligingly offers to be Gebir's guide on the occasion. Dante peopled Hades with his personal enemies ; Ariosto with frigid, over-chaste women ; but Gebir meets no folks there but warriors, or those who have been or are destined to be impelled by the lust of conquest or power. Foremost among these tortured shades are Gebir's own ancestors. The hero then makes the acquaintance of the Stewarts, both father and son, and then is introduced to the immortal William, to whom, according to Southey, we are indebted, not only for our glorious constitution, but for the preservation of Protestantism. But the triumph of the Orange champion, however sacred to his friend, seemed to Landor only fit to be jeered at in the vaults of hell. Among other persons pointed out by the mysterious guide as undergoing condign punishment for his crimes, is George III., whom Southey placed in heaven, and held up to his readers as the incarnation of every public and private virtue. Landor, however, takes rather a different view of this monarch, though

* Book i., ls. 214—17.

the portrait is somewhat disguised, to escape any notice the Attorney-General might have taken of the matter :—

“Aroar ! what wretch that nearest us ? what wretch
Is that, with eyebrows white and slanting brow ?

* * * * *

He, too, among my ancestors ?” “O king,
Iberia bore him ; but the breed accurst,
Inclement winds blew blighting from north-east.”

Gebir wishes to know by what crimes the man with the slanting brow had deserved his fate :—

“He was a warrior, then, nor fear'd the gods ?”

To whom Aroar :—

“Gebir ! he fear'd the demons, not the gods,
Tho' them indeed his daily face adored,
And was no warrior ; yet the thousand lives
Squander'd as stones to exercise a sling.”*

Leaving George to his fate, Aroar and his companion scramble beyond the boundary of hell to quieter regions, where they are visited by the breezes which scatter perfumes around their path, and the beams which fill with liquid light the groves of the blessed. Heaven and Hades, in the imagination alike of poets and divines, have been separated by a wide gulf of space,—so wide, indeed, that the lightning's wing, after a day's travel, would flag over it like that of a tired bird. But Landor treats the two regions as wings of one compartment, dividing them only by a flaming arch, which parts asunder every two years in order that the damned and the blessed may be refreshed with the sight of each other. They also derive from this ingenious contrivance the knowledge, not very gratifying to either party, that the fires which constitute the misery of the one conduces to the happiness of the other.

The contrast between the fate of the ambitious and the peaceful is still more fully elaborated in the fortunate issue of

* Book iii., ls. 131—42.

Tamar's affairs as contrasted with the dolorous end of Gebir's over-vaulting aspirations. The sea-nymph conducts Tamar to her ocean grot, triumphant over the waves, surrounded by immortals who congratulate the shepherd on his coming happiness. But instead of describing the consummation of this rather singular courtship, we are merely introduced to the topography of the situation :—

First arose
To his astonish'd and delighted view
The sacred isle that shrines the queen of love ;
It stood so near him, so acute each sense,
That not the symphony of lutes alone,
Or coo serene, or billing strife of doves,
But murmurs, whispers,—nay, the very sighs
Which he himself had uttered once, he heard.
Next, but long after and far off, appear
The cloud-like cliffs and thousand towers of Crete,
And farther to the right the Cyclades,

* * * * *

He saw the land of Pelops, host of gods ;
Saw the steep ridge where Corinth after stood,
Beckoning the Ionians with their smiling arts,
Into her sun-bright bay. * * * *

* * * * *

And now the chariot of the sun descends,
The waves rush hurried from his foaming steeds,
Smoke issues from their nostrils at the gate,
Which, when they enter, with huge golden bar,
Atlas, and Calpè close across the sea.*

Thus, like Southey in critical emergencies, Landor is very disappointing : where we expect love-making, we get topographical information ; and while we wait for a description of internal emotion, we are driven to despair by the projection of a frieze. We are left entirely to our own imagination to realize the great bliss which Tamar is enjoying as a counterfoil to the miseries reserved for his unfortunate brother, though the dark side of the picture is minutely portrayed. Horrid warnings assail

Gebir on the very morning Tamar is led over the waves to his bridal home. About to snatch his triumph, he is circumvented by "pain, diseases, death," and all the other evils which

Stamp on the slippery pavement of the proud,
And ring their sounding emptiness through earth.*

Tamar's happiness involved that of his nymph bride and all their associates. The disasters of Gebir destroyed the peace of Charoba and the fortunes of their subjects :—

Thus raved Charoba : horror, grief, amaze,
Pervaded all the host ; all eyes were fix'd ;
All stricken motionless and mute. The feast
Was like the feast of Cepheus, when the sword
Of Phineus, white with wonder, shook restrain'd,
And the hilt rattled in his marble hand.
She heard not, saw not ; every sense was gone ;
One passion banish'd all : dominion, praise,
The world itself was nothing. Senseless man !
What would thy fancy figure now from worlds ?
There is no world to them that grieve and love.†

This poem ought to form the evangelium of the Peace Society, or of the respectable confraternity of Quakers. For vice and virtue are identified in it with ambition and repose ; and war, no matter what its object, earns for its instigator eternal castigation.

"Gebir" is the most complete of Landor's poems. It also contains more effective passages than any other of his finished productions. Though written on the threshold of manhood, he never surpassed the effort ; in fact, he always seemed loathe to try. Yet "Gebir," though a striking production for a young man, will not place his name very high in the catalogue of poets. There is little imaginative passion in the piece, no flight from the region of incident into that of the abstract, nor is there any philosophy made sensible. The heart remains unmoved, and the understanding is not instructed. The utter improb-

* Book vi., ls. 210—11.

† Book vii., ls. 224—34.

bility of the story, and the absurd motives upon which the cardinal incidents of the piece turn, destroy all appearance of verisimilitude. To talk of deriving pleasure from a poem which one has to sit down to study like a geometrical problem, is out of all question. Hence "Gebir" has never had, nor is likely to have, many readers. Hitherto, few beyond Shelley, De Quincey, and Southey set any store by the volume : Shelley, for its wild radicalism ; De Quincey, for its plastic beauty ; and Southey, for its divine poetry. The two former qualities it possesses in a high degree ; the latter it certainly has not.

The great fault of "Gebir" consists in inartistic treatment. The most prosaic details of the story are brought out, Southey-like, with painful elaboration ; while those, in which the reader might naturally have been led to take an interest, are either summarily disposed of or omitted altogether. Hence the reader moves along on a certain monotonous level, where at one point he ought to scale the Olympian heights of rapture, and at the next to be plunged in the abyss of despair. A bleak air of coldness chills even the warmest portions of the piece ; as if the story had been sculptured in a frieze, and Landor, instead of dealing with flesh-and-blood emotions, was only versifying marble. In "Gebir"—as, indeed, in most of Landor's other pieces—the best descriptions come upon us like a succession of statues or figures in *bas-relievo*. They are beautifully grouped, and exquisitely finished. They remind us of processions on antique marbles, or bronze mouldings on palace gates. We survey the works of the artist with a full appreciation of their beauty, but without feeling the slightest emotions of sympathy with the feelings they exhibit ; we move through the scenes he depicts as through a hall of statuary, and marvel that the artist who could call up such figures before us, should have lacked the power to endue them with passion and intelligence.

Landor tried his hand at tragedy ; but beyond incidental passages of some power, not to much effect. He regarded plot

as mere trick. The ancients had not descended to it; why should he? The development of character arising out of the sequence of logical events, which constitutes the backbone of the modern drama, Landor thought unworthy of a sensible man. The stage should represent, not phases of action, but phases of suffering. This was natural enough when the faces of actors were covered with a mask, when a tragedy was a religious ceremony, when a chorus sermonized, at the end of the acts, upon the past, and threw out suggestions which prefigured the future. But to maintain this theory when the state of manners and society which necessitated it had passed away, would have been fatal to the genius of Shakespeare. But to Landor, the consequence has been simple extinction. None of his plays have been produced on the stage; nor can they, without a considerable amount of tenacity, be mastered in the closet.

It is remarkable that Landor should have selected for the subject of his first tragedy the downfall of the Spanish Roderic, a theme which Scott and Southey were already brooding over for poetic purposes, and that a subject so teeming with romantic incident should have experienced such scanty justice at their hands. Landor's tragedy is in reality only a succession of fragmentary conversations divided into scenes which have little apparent connection, unless we imagine the historical situation as the background. There is no plot, no evolution of character, no development of concerted action. Corilla, Julian's daughter, is seduced by Roderic; Egilona, Roderic's wife, marries Abdalagis. But there are no love entanglements, no expressions of attachment from any of the parties, and we are only made aware of these facts, as in a Greek play, by incidental reflection, assuming that they have actually taken place. Moslem armies at the call of a recreant chief overrun Spain; a throne is overturned; the cross everywhere disappears before the crescent; austere pontiffs exchange the mitre for the turban, the frigid pursuits of the cloister for the wanton dalliances of love. But with the exception of the invading army, none

of these things appear in the tragedy, and the invading army is only introduced as an appendage to Julian, who disappears in a most unsatisfactory manner at the close, leaving the reader with the invading army in a state of embarrassment, the one with a half-completed conquest, the other with a story still more incomplete, which commences in the middle, and suddenly collapses before the end. In fact, Landor's design seems to have been not so much to write a tragedy, which his piece is wrongly named, but to hold up the chief personage in his group, in a position of monumental implacability to the end of time. Everything appears to be sacrificed to the character of Count Julian, who is incessantly produced on the scene as the very incarnation of abyssmal sorrow, who, in the midst of his victories, has no hope either from men in this world, or from God in the next. He feasts on grief, and really seems to enjoy the banquet in proportion to the bitterness of the viands served up to him. The ravishment of his daughter, the desolation of his kindred, the overturning of his creed, the butchery of his family, these are the things which, like the inverted pincushion of Villaneuf, he constantly presses to his heart, feeling no satisfaction but in the increase of his misery. As he has no pity on himself, he is inclined to have as little upon others. Nothing will content him but to have every one made as miserable as himself. The whole world must be involved in his ruin. His country he consigns to invaders, his religion to infidels, his wife and children to assassins, his daughter to exile, Roderic to ignominy, himself to perdition. Perhaps, there is no other example of sublime despair, of imperturbable grief, of lofty impenitence in any literature. But it is unnatural. We cannot conceive the existence of Landor's Julian in the world of fact, and in the world of art only as a monumental myth out of all character with the compatibilities of mediæval existence.

Landor was so wedded to classical forms as to dramatize the life of Giovanna of Naples under the form of a trilogy, the first play culminating in the murder of her husband, Andrea

of Hungary ; the second in the trial of the queen before Rienzi at Rome ; the third in the fall of Fra Rupert. His design was to rescue the fair queen from the cloud of suspicion under which she labours, conjointly with her Scottish cousin, of having been concerned in the plot which so summarily disposed of her husband. But Landor's success was by no means equal to the chivalry of the effort. He would not write for living England, but for dead Athens ; not for the present generation, but for a state of society more than two thousand years consigned to dust. Hence the greatest characters of the eighteenth century—Petrarch, Rienzi, Boccacio—are summoned before us ; kingdoms are revolutionized ; a lovely queen loses her throne, and goes through a succession of adventures, without exciting in us the slightest interest. All the characters seem cut out of the same block of granite ; and as they are found at the beginning, they remain to the end. His heroes never shape events : they are simply kicked about by circumstance, and only speculate upon whatever card that unspiritual god chooses to turn up.

Everything in the nature of action is supposed to take place behind the scenes. The reader knows nothing of any catastrophe which may be in course of preparation, until it bursts upon him from the secret laboratory of Fate. By this contrivance he is relieved of a certain amount of anxious suspense. He is also enabled to get through the most sensational page of the thirteenth century history, without experiencing a single feeling of vulgar interest. This was, to use Landor's phrase, treading down Alfieri at the heel. It was also treading down the patience of his readers. The trilogy, therefore, is the most unreadable portion of Landor's works. It is simply unintelligible without a reference to the history of the period, nor has it any form of dramatic life beyond that of imaginary conversations.

How far Landor, had he given up his classical theories, would have been successful in this branch of his art, it is really

impossible to say. He lacks pathos. He also exhibits no sense of the facetious. His histrionic mask evinces neither tears nor risibility. In particular passages, especially where there is room for statuesque display, he is very effective, as where Julian in the hour of victory confesses his own misery before the ruined Roderic, whom he has dethroned :—

I stand abased before insulting crime.

* * * * *

The hand that hurl'd thy chariot o'er its wheels,
That held thy steeds erect and motionless
As molten statues on some palace-gate,
Shakes as with palsied age before thee now.*

And in his “Andrea of Hungary,” where Caraffa gives vent to his passion for what he cannot enjoy :—

The pagan

Who heaves up Ætna

* *

* * * is better off than I am :

He groans upon the bed where lies his torment,
I very far away from where lies mine.†

And where the same speaker again avows his love for Giovanna :

He who thinks little of such perfection,
Has left his thoughts among the worms which creep
In charnel-houses, among brainless skulls,
Dry bones without a speck of blood or thread
Of fibre, ribs that never cased a heart.

* * * * *

Even rocks and stones

Would split, if my heart's fire were pent within.‡

In a dramatic sketch intended to reproduce the events connected with the deaths of Cleopatra and Antony, a subject more germane to his taste than the mediæval subjects he was always attempting to force into Greek frames, there are some

* Act iv., sc. i.

† Act ii., sc. v.

‡ Act ii., sc. vi.

passages which would do credit to the Elizabethan dramatists, as where Gallus indicates to Cæsar his preference for his native country :—

Give me the banks of Arico, where young Spring,
Who knows not half the names of her own flowers,
Looks into Summer's eyes, and wakes him up
Alert, and laughs at him until he lifts
His rod of roses, and she runs away.*

And again in his description of Cleopatra :—

Tho' more than thrice seven years have come, and stolen
Day after day a leaf or two of bloom,
She has but changed her beauty ; the soft tears
Fall, one would think, to make it bloom afresh.†

Equally characteristic is what I may call his bust of Julius Cæsar :—

Well I remember that high-exalted brow,
Those eyes of eagle under it, those lips
At which the senate and the people stood
Expectant for their portals to uncloze ;
Then speech, not womanly, but manly sweet,
Came from them, and shed pleasure as the moon
Sheds light.‡

But such passages are rare ; and even were they frequent, still, being discontinuous, insulated, and fragmentary, unconnected with any principles of consecutive action or philosophy, they would not entitle their author to a high place among his contemporaries.

That a writer so constituted as Landor, with fitful emotions and no great depth of intellect, should, like Prior, have amused himself with pelting bits of satire at the men and things which came in his way, and enshrining in verse any incident

* "Scenes for a Study."

† *Idem.*

‡ *Idem.*

which captivated his attention, from the fall of a fan to the discovery of a planet, was a matter of course. These *vers de société* constitute the greater portion of the books entitled "Heroic Idyls" and the "Fruits of an Old Tree," and the complete portion of the work which appeared under the singular name of "Dry Sticks Faggoted." Some of these verses, miscellaneous and fugitive in their nature, will bear comparison with any similar effusions in the language. Occasionally we get the caustic irony of Swift :—

How soon, alas ! the hours are over,
 Counted us out to play the lover !
 And how much narrower is the stage,
 Allotted us to play the sage !
 But when we play the fool, how wide
 The theatre expands ; beside,
 How long the audience sits before us,
 How many prompters ! what a chorus !

But the most numerous in the collection enshrine the fleeting feminine attachments which constituted the staple charm of his life :—

Soon, O Ianthe ! life is o'er,
 And sooner beauty's heavenly smile :
 Kiss only, and I ask no more,
 Let love remain that little while.

And again :—

It often comes into my head
 That we may dream when we are dead,
 But I am far from sure we do ;
 O that it were so !—then my rest
 Would ever be among the blest,
 For I should ever dream of you.

But sometimes these occasional verses soar above the region of mere wit, and a tinge of melancholy sinks the thought deep into the heart, as in lines written while sitting in his room, as was his wont, without candles, while night was coming on :—

My pictures blacken in their frames,
As night comes on,
And youthful maids and wrinkled dames
Are now all gone.

Death of the day !—a sterner death
Did worse before :
The fairest form and balmiest breath
Away he bore.

And in the sorrowful lines in which he confesses his incompetency to renew a past amour :—

No, my own love of other years,
No, it must never be !
Much rests with you that yet endears—
Alas ! but what with me ?

Could those bright years o'er me revolve
So gay, o'er you so fair,
The pearl of life we would dissolve,
And each the cup might share.

You show that truth can ne'er decay,
Whatever fate befalls ;
I, that the myrtle and the bay
Shoot fresh o'er ruined walls.

The bitterness of his feelings with regard to his private feuds could not be suppressed even in his address to the place, near Bath, which he had chosen for his last resting-place :—

Widcombe ! few seek with thee their resting-place,
But I, when I have run my weary race,
Will throw my bones upon thy churchyard turf ;
Although malignant waves on foreign shore
Have stranded me, and I shall lift no more
My hoary head above the hissing surf.

But the merit of the greater portion of these pieces consists not so much in the novelty or beauty of the thought, as in melody of rhythm and aptitude of expression. Had he written nothing else than these, they would have earned for him a very

good place among the fugitive verse writers of his language, but nothing more.

Landor's true place among the poets of this century should, therefore, hardly rise above the boundary line which separates the lowest assignable division of his art. In expressing in verse, as a sculptor in marble, any momentary embodiment of passion, or a group of figures in statuesque attitudes, perhaps no writer has excelled Landor. But poetry has to do, not with fixed phases of passion, not with stereotyped forms of beauty limited to points of time and space, but with progressive development of being, which soars beyond the boundaries of the present, and claims past and future worlds for its province. The imagination which would make the fortune of an artist or a sculptor, would form a very poor pittance for a poet. The triumph of the one is confined to fixing one fleeting moment of existence within a certain few inches of space. He is the slave of the clock, and cannot get out of his private room. But the other drags time, with all its baggage, at his chariot-wheels like a conqueror, and finds illimitable space too narrow for his conceptions. His imagination overleaps the walls of creation. The universe is but a scroll in his hands.

CHAPTER IX.

ROMANTIC SCHOOL.

Byron.

ONE of the great features of the poetry of the eighteenth century was the predominance of words over thoughts, of style over substance, of the mere polish of language over the matter conveyed. Poets did not deal with topics of everyday life, or with those objects which new forms of civilization were constantly bringing into view; but with the old themes, with which they had no relationship, except through the medium of the fancy, and which they could only clothe with freshness by imparting to them a new dress. Even Thomson cannot describe the approach of Spring without imaging her as a goddess descending like the nymph in a transformation scene, in a galaxy of roses from a cloud; or so common a subject as a pattering spring shower, without anticipating the style of Della Crusca :—

At last

The clouds consign their treasures to the fields,
And softly shaking on the dimpled pool
Prelusive drops, let all their moisture flow
In large effusion o'er the feathered world.

Cowper, who dealt with some of the commonest incidents of his life, and who even did not think the knitting-needles of Mrs. Unwin below the subject of his muse, is more remarkable for the raciness and elegant force of his language than for

the boldness of his imagination or the newness of his thoughts. His sphere was too confined, his intellectual horizon too restricted, to enable him to do more than merely point out the direction in which the change should be made. The Wartons attempted, on the other hand, to impart a new phase to the poetry of the epoch by an infusion of the Gothic element, but did really nothing more than bring fresh ornaments to the treatment of the old range of subjects. Poetry never got further with them than Odes to Fancy, Contemplations in Solitude, Addresses to Morning, and all those subjects which the poet sports with in his fancy, rather than enters into with his heart. Burns is the only poet who sang as it were out of the necessities of his nature. He extended Cowper's realistic treatment, and sculptured all his experiences in verse. But from his limited culture, he only effected a reform. It needed men of wider range of thought, of more comprehensive sympathy, and more commanding eminence, to achieve a revolution. Wordsworth was the first writer who struck the balance between the naked conceptions and mere verbal or adventitious ornaments of poetry; and Byron the first poet who actually inverted the old position of things, by showing how ideas may outstrip language by the very impetuosity of the fountain from which they have their source. On the shoulders of these two men, the mantle of poetry sat as the visible raiment of their souls; and, perhaps, the history of any literature, certainly that of our own, does not present another instance of two contemporary bards occupying so high an eminence in their art, unconsciously conspiring to effect the same revolution, yet treading in paths so opposite to each other.

Byron and Wordsworth, though moving in spheres of thought so divergent, were the resultants of the same forces acting upon different temperaments, in one direction. The French Revolution had taught inquiring minds to examine into everything, and irreverent minds to obey the ruling impulse of the hour, with a blind fanaticism. The mere babyism of literature, the

display of tinsel decorations without spiritual substance, could no longer be endured. Wordsworth entered upon his new mission with a strong moral will, every thought repugnant to which was only called up to receive merited castigation; Byron, with an intensity of passion which could brook no restraint, and which was the more indulged, because he felt the rottenness and insincerity of most of the barriers which society opposed to its gratification. The muse of Wordsworth found a home in sounding the depths of philosophy, in unveiling the analogies which bind the material and the spiritual universe into one system; that of Byron, in laying bare the intricate mazes of the feelings, in fathoming the darker recesses of the human heart, in displaying nature in its grandest energies, whether as imaged in the sea-storm and mountain tempest, or in the tumults of the soul, aroused from its lethargies by the allurements of heroic enterprise or passionate guilt. Society, to Wordsworth, was governed by recondite moral laws; to Byron, it was the sport of chance. Wordsworth saw in the physical universe the temple of the soul, with all things munificently arranged therein for its security and happiness. Byron, though acknowledging in the material world certain fixed laws, saw little relationship in these laws to man, beyond the product of a large amount of discomfort and misery. Wordsworth inveighed against human institutions, as the only fount of the evils which afflicted society. Byron went considerably further, including nature in the record, and carrying the arraignment up to the throne of God Himself.

It is, however, in relation to Christianity that the intellectual discrepancy of the two men is most apparent. Wordsworth regarded the religious institutions of the country as the very ark of humanity; Byron, as mere spiritual shams, rather obstacles to be removed than levers to help men forward in their progressive course to a nobler future. Wordsworth believed in rites and formularies as the outer embodiments of the Christian spirit; Byron seems to have believed that such spirit was dead, and that its

rites and formularies were encumbering ground which ought to be taken up with new creations, more germane to that universal brotherhood of love which such formularies tended rather to extinguish than develope. Wordsworth appeared to think that creeds should be estimated by the quantity of abstract or absolute truth they conveyed ; Byron, by their fitness to the wants of the epoch :

Religions die out every thousand years,
Or need a new refreshment from the spheres.

Both held that the outer universe partook in a large degree of the effulgence, if not of the nature, of the Divinity. But Wordsworth expressly maintained that the human soul, pure at its birth, encountered no temptations to evil but those from without ; while Byron regarded it as smitten with disease in its source, and subject to internal impulses to crime which it could not resist. It is singular that Wordsworth, though so persistent a supporter of Christian formularies, should have entertained convictions diametrically at war with them ; while Byron, who repudiated such formularies, held opinions which to a great extent afforded them a dogmatic basis !

There cannot, I think, be a doubt that the field of Byron's triumphs was much more adapted to the spirit of poetry than that chosen by Wordsworth, since the sphere of passion breathing the sentiments of the heart, is more capable of being idealized than that of reflection, the province of the brain. Nor can there, I think, be a doubt that Byron displayed in his higher poetical sphere, his superiority to Wordsworth in the limited province within which that poet confined himself. Had Byron in the treatments of his subjects only equalled Wordsworth, he must have evinced greater powers than his contemporary, as his was a higher range of art. But Byron's superiority is evinced by the fact that he frequently combines passion with grand bursts of reflection, while Wordsworth never disturbs the limpid stream of reflection by grand bursts of passion. In "The Excursion" it would be impossible to produce a line which conveys, with the

rapidity of a conductor, electric shocks of feeling to the depths of the heart. But "*Childe Harold*," while crowded with such passages, exhibits in the last two cantos as much psychological analysis as would furnish a very good chapter of metaphysics. The commanding powers of Byron led him through a much wider range of subjects than Wordsworth, and enabled him to obtain superior excellence in all. Satire was so alien to Wordsworth's nature that he was utterly incapacitated from attempting it ; but satire was a department in which Byron excelled. Wordsworth only tried his hand at one narrative poem, which has the unlucky distinction of being the worst in the language ; * Byron wrote several, and nearly all of first-class excellence. Wordsworth wrote only one play, which has never been acted, and which no one cares to read ; Byron wrote many, which, though only of second-rate merit, had, and still possess, a certain amount of popularity. In lyrical poetry, the comparison is still more to the disadvantage of Wordsworth, who can hardly be said to have tried this department of his art, in which Byron covered himself with glory. In the sonnet and reflective poem, I confess Wordsworth's superiority ; but these belong to a lower range of art than the narrative, the lyrical, and dramatic sphere, in which Byron infinitely distanced his competitor. As reflective poets, the difference between Byron and Wordsworth, to the advantage of the latter, is not half so great as the difference between them, to the advantage of the former, in any of the departments in which Byron pre-eminently excelled. That difference appears to me to consist in this : that, whereas the reflections of Byron's hero are desultory, springing out of the country which Harold visits, and the scenery and monuments with which he is brought in contact, those of Wordsworth's heroes are systematic and introspective—the principles expounded deriving their elucidation rather from the general world of man than from the narrow specifications of time and place. Wordsworth's reflections are the product of the mind reposing on the heights of abstract thought,

* "*The White Doe of Rylstone*."

descending occasionally for illustration among the range of material phenomena, upon which it habitually looks as from a lofty eminence ; those of Byron have their mainspring in material phenomena, though their flights are often so Titanic as to seem to touch the threshold of heaven. They are, taken singly, in point of artistic finish and glowing beauty, grander than anything of a similar character in Wordsworth. But when we consider their straggling nature, and their utter want of subservience to a moral aim, the superiority of his rival becomes manifest. Wordsworth moves through the regions of speculation self-supporting, with his thoughts revolving on their own axis, shaping his course with a fixed design, regulated by the attraction of the moral law ; Byron, like a meteor which frequently returns to its volcanic source to be replenished with light, but shedding a far fuller though a more erratic blaze than his contemporary. But there are so many inconsistencies in Wordsworth, he is so prolix, he pins his faith to so many obsolete institutions, believes in so many exploded fallacies, that his system of concatenated thought loses much of its excellence even as a work of art ; while the dashing vigour of Byron, the intensity of force arising from his concentrated earnestness, his absolute freedom from the fetters of prejudice, his manner of allying feeling with reflection, of illuminating his subjects rather with the flashes of wit than with the slower processes of the reason,—all these go far to make up for the disjointed and fragmentary nature of his reflections, which the structure of his poem, no less than that of his own mental constitution, imposed upon him. For Byron appears to have been incapable of digesting his thoughts into a system upon any subject. So far, his inferiority to Wordsworth is immense. Could he have done so, his poetic illustration of his principles would have surpassed even that of his rival. This, however, is the province of the reason preparing the ground for the poet, rather than that of the poet himself. And in all the essential constituents of poetry, apart from its moral end and

æsthetic completeness, "Childe Harold" need not fear comparison with "The Excursion." But "Childe Harold" is by no means the most eminent of Byron's productions in the same sense in which "The Excursion" is the first of Wordsworth's productions. Had Byron written nothing else than this poem, he would have been entitled to a place in the same group as Wordsworth, if not upon a higher seat. For no meditative poem, deriving its topics from an objective source, ever accomplished half so much. The hero is brought in contact with every scene which suggests the most stirring events of the antique and modern world, and the cast of his thoughts impart even dignity to the ennobling associations he recalls. The sublimity of Swiss scenery, illumined by the genius of the men who from its quiet recesses revolutionized the spirit of modern society; the proud chivalry of Spain, peeping, like a landscape behind ruins, through the vista of moral debasement; the classical sternness of Greece rebuking from her broken Parthenon and rifled Theseus the fantastic barbarism of her invaders; the solemn grandeur of Rome mocked by the triumphs of Christian art; the festivities of Venice associating the glories of the middle ages with modern degeneracy;—all these are mirrored forth in the poet's mind with such distinctness as to make the pigmy features of the present fade before the mighty phases of the past, and bring those aspects of humanity nearest to us which are most worthy of being remembered. The fourth canto of "Childe Harold," for what it accomplishes in so small a compass, is indeed a marvel of art unapproached and unapproachable in its abstract grandeur, like that gigantic power the poet attempts to reconstruct, and from the ruins of which he derives his text for the instruction of the nations. For Byron, in this canto, not only etherealizes some of the most bewitching scenery of Italy, till it assumes the hues of a crystalline landscape,—he not only untombs the ancient crowds of the Capitol, and bids them live again, surging round the forum of the tribune, or awakening with their shouts

the sleeping recesses of the Flavian amphitheatre,—he not only invests every phase of that commonwealth which conquered the world, with a freshness, as if it were present, and with an ideality which retains the material in subservience to its spiritual aspects ; but the poet lays bare with the dissecting-knife of the psychologist all those laws of the mind by which these wonders are accomplished. In this canto Byron is poet, philosopher, historian, artist, moralist, antiquarian, and metaphysician. The soul is thrown back upon itself, its spiritual recesses explored, and the occult links revealed by which external objects arouse its passions or absorb its sympathies. When he turns to the objective world, with what power does he strike off in a few lines the spiritual features of Greek art, steeping the productions of the genius of antiquity in the glowing colours of his own mind, until they appear invested with new splendour :—

There, too, the Goddess loves in stone, and fills
 The air around with beauty ; we inhale
 The ambrosial aspect, which, beheld, instils
 Part of its immortality ; the veil
 Of heaven is half undrawn ; within the pale
 We stand, and in that form and face behold
 What Mind can make, when Nature's self would fail ;
 And to the fond idolaters of old
 Envy the innate flash which such a soul could mould :

We gaze and turn away, and know not where,
 Dazzled and drunk with beauty. * *

* * * * * *

Appear'dst thou not to Paris in this guise ?
 Or to more deeply-blest Anchises ? or,
 In all thy perfect goddess-ship, when lies
 Before thee thy own vanquished Lord of War,
 And gazing in thy face as toward a star,
 Laid on thy lap, his eyes to thee upturn,
 Feeding on thy sweet cheek ! while thy lips are
 With lava kisses melting while they burn,
 Showered on his eyelids, brow, and mouth, as from an urn !

Glowing, and circumfused in speechless love,
Their full divinity inadequate
That feeling to express, or to improve,
The gods become as mortals, and man's fate
Has moments like their brightest ; but the weight
Of earth recoils upon us ;—let it go !
We can recall such visions, and create,
From what has been, or might be, things which grow
Into thy statue's form, and look like gods below.*

The conceptions of the sculptor are here again moulded into language with the same force as they are expressed in stone:—

Or, turning to the Vatican, go see
Laocoon's torture dignifying pain—
A father's love and mortal's agony
With an immortal's patience blending ;—vain
The struggle ; vain, against the coiling strain
And gripe, and deepening of the dragon's grasp,
The old man's clench ; the long envenomed chain
Rivets the living links,—the enormous asp
Enforces pang on pang, and stifles gasp on gasp.

Or view the lord of the unerring bow,
The god of life, and poesy, and light—
The Sun in human limbs arrayed, and brow
All radiant from his triumph in the fight ;
The shaft has just been shot—the arrow bright
With an immortal's vengeance ; in his eye
And nostril beautiful disdain, and might,
And majesty, flash their full lightnings by,
Developing in that one glance the Deity.

But in his delicate form—a dream of love,
Shaped by some solitary nymph, whose breast
Long'd for a deathless lover from above,
And maddened in that vision—are expressed
All that ideal beauty ever blessed
The mind with in its most unearthly mood,
When each conception was a heavenly guest—

* C. iv.; sts. 49—52.

A ray of immortality—and stood,
Starlike, around, until they gathered to a god ! *

After familiarizing us with the grandest organism in the world of man, he confronts us with the grandest element in the world of nature. The ocean has always been a familiar theme with poets, but surely none has ever risen to the full height of the subject like Lord Byron. It is hardly too much to say, that if the grandeur and dignity of Rome derives increased state and dignity when reflected in the glowing depths of his mind, the sublimity of the ocean derives renewed force from the grandeur of the images with which he has invested it :—

Thou glorious mirror, where the Almighty's form,
Glasses itself in tempests ! * * *

The image of Eternity—the throne
Of the Invisible ; even out of thy slime
The monsters of the deep are made ; each zone
Obeyes thee * * * *

The armaments which thunderstrike the walls
Of rock-built cities, bidding nations quake,
And monarchs tremble in their capitals,
The oak leviathans, * * *

These are thy toys, and, as the snowy flake,
They melt into thy yeast of waves.

The majesty of Rome among civic structures, as the sublimity of the ocean among earthly elements, is supreme, but Byron has surrounded both with the grandeur of genius which is superior to either.

There are poets, first-class in their own department, who are not, and never could become, representative poets in any wide sense. Wordsworth could never represent anything out of himself. He seldom gives us the properties of anything he

* C. iv., sts. 160—2.

describes, but only his own way of looking at it. And even of representative poets in a wider sense, some, like Scott, can only represent a peculiar section of the past, and others, like Crabbe, a peculiar feature of the present. They apply their minds to master the groundwork of some segment of humanity, they study the upholstery of their subject, and achieve their results as much by the force of talent as by the strokes of genius. But Byron is a representative poet in the highest sense. He is a more general representative poet of the past than Scott, and a far wider representative poet of the present than Crabbe; in fact, he is a representative poet in the same sense as Shakespeare was a representative poet, for he represents the past as well as the present, not indeed any partial cutting, but the whole structure of the age he would describe from copestone to base, the sorrows as well as the joys, the laughter and the groans of fleeting generations. In "Werner," we have Germany staggering under the blows of the Thirty Years' war; in "Marino Faliero," the pride of the Italian republic; in "The Two Foscari," the bloody factions of Venice; in "Sardanapalus," Nineveh tottering in the lap of effeminacy; in "Childe Harold," Rome stereotyped in all the splendour of her prime, just as the juicy succulence of her prosperity was mellowing into the first tinge of decay. I readily allow that his dramatic delineations are of an inferior order of merit, just as some of the historical plays of Shakespeare are of an inferior order of merit. But if Byron is beneath many of his rivals in depicting the past, he is superior to any in depicting the present; for no poet has left behind so faithful and general a portraiture of the lineaments of his age as that which Byron has drawn of the nineteenth century in "Don Juan."

Chaucer was a representative poet, but he only represented the state of English society contemporary with himself. Dante was a representative poet, but he only represented the religious aspects of his age. Spenser and Ariosto were representative poets, but only of mediæval chivalry. Byron is

indeed the only one of the class who has extended his canvas over so broad an area as to embrace in one picture the manners of various countries, and of conflicting civilizations: Russia, Turkey, Greece, Spain, England, succeed each other in this wonderful panorama, with the habits and courts of their people so faithfully sketched, that the portraiture bears all the stamp of living reality. Shipwrecks, land sieges and battles, political intrigues, harem strifes, piratical adventures, feminine coteries, love-making without end, fashionable parties, states' embassies, parliamentary ambitions, are each treated in a tone ever changing from grave to gay, facetious banter giving place to biting ridicule, and both alike alternating with exquisite pathos and deep philosophical reflection, till it is really difficult to determine which spirit most prevails, the mocking satire of Swift, the quiet raillery of Steele, the deep reflection of Young, the gushing tenderness of Rousseau, or the grave morality of Johnson. The powers of the poet are not less diversified than the scenes and characters he describes, though these are of every imaginable order. Wherever we move, the stage is always crowded with figures so distinct and palpable, that, though the creatures of the poet's brain, we firmly believe they have their prototypes in the real world around us. For they manifest the same selfishness, the same scepticism, the same voluptuousness, the same ardent spirit of inquiry, and the same reckless adventure which moulds the souls or directs the energies of most of the actors in the nineteenth century. The poet has really held his mirror up to nature—shown "vice her own deformity, virtue her own image, and every circumstance and habit of the time its form and pressure." We hardly know which to admire most, that cordial sympathy with which he enters into every condition and rank of life, that world-embracing instinct for the æsthetic and the true, under every sky, to which his conceptions owe much of their inborn fire and energy, or the spontaneous burst of classical language, unsurpassed for its chaste vigour and flexile

sinuosity of strength, in which those conceptions are enshrined. In reading Spenser, we never get out of the world of ideality and romance. He never impresses us with the reality of his conceptions, and though there is music in his swelling cadences of the loftiest kind, and diversity in his characters, it is a music and diversity which repeat themselves in one unvarying round. But Byron is ever passing with untired wing from the world of imagination to the world of fact, equally supreme in both spheres; and when the last symphony dies away, or the previous actors disappear, it is only to give prominence to still more novel combinations of the ideal and the actual. I do not, therefore, think the critic will be far wrong in placing "Don Juan" on the topmost shelf of English literature, as the grandest representative poem in any language. I feel sure, if Englishmen were asked to select which of their literary treasures they would place first in order, the choice would fall on four or five of the leading dramas of Shakespeare; and if pressed to point out which they would select next, that work would be "Paradise Lost;" but I feel as sure, if their selection was put to a third proof, their choice would fall on "Don Juan."

To urge the incompleteness of "Don Juan" as a defect would be pre-eminently unfair, as it was evidently a work in progress, and the four cantos which Byron wrote in Greece were destroyed for fear of wounding the fashionable susceptibilities in whose flesh the shafts of his ridicule had most rankled.* If the poem is purposeless, so far is it true to the age it would represent.

* The fearful Vandalism of this act, as well as the destruction of the Memoirs, in consenting to which Moore displayed his usual cringing subservience to aristocratic influence, is not paralleled in literary history. Can any one contemplate without indignation the *chef-d'œuvre* of one of the first geniuses of any age or country ruthlessly truncated, and posterity thus cheated out of one of its chief treasures, in order that the cream of Lord H.'s equanimity may not be ruffled, or Lady K.'s singular notions of propriety may be supported before the world?

For what era could be more aimless than the first quarter of the nineteenth century? The Napoleonic wars had just been concluded, without settling, and without being intended to settle, anything. The English nation had been fooled into spending its best blood, and taxing the energies of myriads yet unborn with hundreds of millions of debt, simply for the extinction of one man. Could anything have been more cruelly purposeless than that? No spiritual results had been achieved, or indeed so much as aimed at. The highest embodiments of statesmanship were beheld in the Percevals, and the Castlereaghs, under whom was carried out the great political juggle of the time—the union of England and Ireland, which was supposed to be consummated by the exclusion of nearly the whole of her population from the commonest civil rights. The high-road of national inquiry ended everywhere in the quagmire of scepticism. Nothing was valued except money, nothing appreciated save pleasure, nothing believed in but success. Those grand iron pathways, yoking steam and fire to the subservience of man's higher destinies, those electric nerves flashing his intelligence under seas, and making the impulses of his will felt almost as soon as they were conceived, at the antipodes, by which the century has done much to redeem its lack of soul, and spiritual remissness, had not arisen. The moral laxity inspired by a protracted war had flung back the energies of the soul, in the absence of any other vent, upon sensuous enjoyments, and the coarsest of these were covered by the thin gauze of conventional propriety, which often presented vice in the garb of religion. To reflect all these inconsistencies, the bard must pursue a course equally erratic with that of the age which he describes. He must appear to have no design beyond what momentary impulse inspires; he must launch his hero, as it were, upon the wave of chance, and make him the victim of the chapter of accidents, the product of an age which seems to have lost all belief in the control of a superintending Providence.

But in reality, so far is "Don Juan" from being purposeless, that under its seemingly erratic surface there lies an object of grand significance. The aim of this poem is to unmask hypocrisy, to silence superstition, to dethrone the popular idols and the spiritual shams so grossly misleading the people of the day. The object of the poet was to turn a shallow world inside-out, to show the social weaknesses lurking behind its apparent strength, and occasionally to electrify it by glimpses into the infinite depths of the spiritual element of which it was only an empty bubble on the surface. If here a ghostly pretension was exposed, if there a political blunder was laughed out of countenance,—if in one place he transfixed with his shaft the heartlessness of pompous conventionality turning poor human nature shivering out of doors, if in another he derides dogmatic formularies which kill the Christian spirit, of which they affect to be the living exponent,—all this was only to array in more attractive colours the sublimities of man's spiritual nature, and the grandeur of the outer universe beating in symphony with it, a combination of glory upon which God had set His seal, revealing in its effulgent hieroglyphs the high destinies to which man might aspire, could he read his own nature aright, and not be deluded by the wretched scrawls blurred over the divine page by prejudice and custom. Byron does not propound, or appear himself to have formed, any systematic notion of the revelation in the palimpsest; but by erasing the absurdities on the surface, here and there, we get flashes of meaning glittering underneath, which shed a baleful glare on the delusions above, as the marble pavement of a Roman bath, when exhumed from the rubbish of centuries, reflects a broader light upon the barbarisms by which it has been concealed. It is these startling contrasts between the loftier yearnings of man's nature and the hollow mockeries of society which constitute alike the object and the charm of "Don Juan." The poet never destroys except to reveal. The outer frivolities of the poem are only a vehicle for the deepest earnestness wherewith the poet arraigns the institutions of his

age, and would make their misshapen materials but the stepping-stones on which men might rise to higher things.

The charge of immorality alleged against this noble poem seems to me to be founded on a wrong notion of art, which in its representative character is bound to reflect all the features of its subject. It would be trite at this time of day to assert that all unchaste painting must be regarded from the object in view, and if this be not to excite lascivious ideas, but to present human nature in all its aspects, the picture is clearly justifiable. But people who deride conventual notions in real life, do not scruple to espouse such notions with zealous enthusiasm when they enter into the domain of art. Instead of making that domain include the whole of the actual and infinite existences beyond, they would restrict its functions to the representation of such bleak natures as never wandered beyond the walls of gloomy asceticism. If in artistic representation, passion is to be struck out of the heart of man, and he is to be depicted in no scenes except where he is the willing instrument of the virtues or the mere automaton of the intellect, there must be an end of artistic representation altogether; for nothing indeed would then be represented as it is, but everything as it is not. It is not for the poet, to assume the gown and bands of the moral preacher, when he delineates vice; nor ought he to dwell any longer on the lascivious than is sufficient for the truthfulness of the representation, or to make such pictures more frequent than is required for the faithful portraiture of his subject. Now Byron was too consummate an artist to overstep the boundaries of nature in any of these particulars, and in the loosest of his pictures he never stoops to those obscene expressions of which we find so many examples in the Elizabethan dramatists, the Georgian novelists, and Leonine poets, although his age cloaked a far greater amount of vice under a deeper garb of sanctity. If the poet, true to the representative character of his poem, laid bare the disguise with too rude a hand he is no more on that account to be

denounced as immoral, than Shakespeare is to be stigmatized as immoral for the songs he puts into the mouth of Ophelia, or the picture of lechery he displays in the loves of Edgar, or for the loose language he puts into the mouth of Iago in the opening scenes of "Othello," or of Lucio in the closing scenes of "Measure for Measure." The aim of both was the exhibition of human nature in all its aspects,—to give us actual men and women, not the aspirations of angels mingled with the quintessence of brutes, not the monstrous abortions of Southey, with all the vices arrayed in one group of characters and all the virtues in the other. But Shakespeare never alludes to the religious features of his subject without the greatest reverence. The privilege is, therefore, extended to him of being as unchaste as the nature of his subject required; whereas Byron, on account of his slighting treatment of religious dogmas, is not allowed to undrape a neck or an ankle without being assailed with a cry of indignant remonstrance.

Considering Byron as the poet of passion in its intensest sense, considering that there is hardly a poem of any magnitude he ever wrote in which he does not depict love in its most fiery moods, surging the depths of the heart like volcanic lava, and shattering in its throes the restraints of conscience and the sovereignty of the reason; considering, likewise, the temptations of a mind unfettered by religious influences or social restraints, to overleap the boundaries of propriety, it is really wonderful that the poet has thrown so much of his immortal nature into his delineations, that he has succeeded far more powerfully than any other bard in steeping this fiery quintessence of dust in such ethereal light that, though employed upon objects of earth, it seems part of that fire which Prometheus filched from heaven. This is, perhaps, the most characteristic proof that the poet has given us of his grand powers: that, while treating love in its most sensuous aspects, he has so etherealized the passion as to submerge the corporeal in the spiritual element; so that we get all the charms of material enjoyment, lit up by the splendours of the

ideal world. Love in the pages of Beaumont and Fletcher, or of Farquhar and Congreve, is a body without soul ; love in the pages of Crashaw or More is a soul without body ; but love in the pages of Byron is that union of both which makes the soul the predominating feature, casting over the fires of its corporeal agent that witchery of colour which leaves them all their vigour while it deprives them of all their coarseness. The loves in "Lara" and "Conrad" are of an illegitimate character ; but the fervour is so intense, the mutual interlacing of passion is so spiritual, that we feel the body is but the passive agent of the soul, imparting to it the dead aliment which feeds the flame with undying lustre. It is sufficient to recall what Camoens did with his island in the African waters, though his lovers were chivalric seamen and ideal nymphs, and what Byron did with his island in the South Seas, though his lovers were bluff English sailors and the sensuous daughters of Otaheite, to prove that Byron could etherealize the most sensuous subject, and that the spiritual features of love were those which most dominated his soul. The picture in which we would expect the most refinement has all the coarseness of a Wapping casino ; the other, in which we would expect to meet with the roughest sensuality, has all the refinement of a group by Titian. The fact is that the most licentious passion, in Byron's serious delineations, assumes an ethereal flush which makes the material element, even in its conquest over the higher powers of the soul, partake of that soul's glorified nature, dispersed though it be in fragmentary gleams ; somewhat like those conquerors who have subjugated a country, only in turn to become the willing slaves of those arts and laws they had shattered into ruin. For all Byron's graver heroes, in their wildest of moods, lean only on one breast. Theirs is an intensity of passion for one object which defies time, or absence, or a multiplied surfeit of beauty, to work any change except that of increased adoration for the form with whose destiny their own is inseparably entwined. One tithe of such devotion would make married life a paradise.

Byron carries into the heart of what society deems the irregular passions such fervour of spirit, and intensity of affection, as to make his love burn with a light of unquenched ardour to which the flames of conjugal affection are tame in comparison, and of which, if society furnished us with more examples, the stigmas so undeservedly applied to this feature of Lord Byron's poetry would be less inconsistent. If he has sinned in anything, it is in imparting to these attachments the durability and persistency of the virtues. He has thrown around the wild fevers of unrestrained love far more ethereal drapery, far loftier chastity of colouring than the most strait-laced poets impart to the tamer delineations of domestic felicity. The passions of his heroes partake of the infinite. Their yearnings are never cloyed, but increase in intensity as they experience repletion, because they spring from the soul, whose longings after beauty are as unsatiable as its cravings for the divine source from which it derives its birth.

Could Byron have grasped the ramifications of a comprehensive plot, could he have imparted symmetry of design to miscellaneous materials arising out of the development of united action, he might have surpassed Milton. Could he, in addition, have created characters with grand spiritual physiognomies evolved out of the incidents, and not merely panelled into the descriptions of his pieces, he might have equalled Shakespeare. But these were qualities in which Byron was most deficient. As he lacked the power of systematizing his thoughts, he was equally incompetent to melt down a mass of heterogeneous materials in the crucible of his brain, and evolve therefrom some great design, breathing throughout the romantic variety and symmetrical proportion of its parts the grand unity of the whole. The cantos of "*Don Juan*" are only connected by the thread of the hero's name, which if we sever, all the incidents, like so many beads on a string, would fall asunder into so many pieces of isolated adventure. "*Childe Harold*" has not even the poor advantage of this slender ligament; for in

the first two cantos the hero is regarded as quite distinct from the writer, and in the last two he is confounded with himself. So in his dramas he seldom strays out of the framework presented to him by history. He appears to have early felt the lack of constructive powers in his purely narrative poems, and to have thrown all his subsequent energies upon meditation and description. The outline of the mutiny story is just what an ordinary reader fresh from Bligh's narrative would have conceived. The "Giaour" and the "Bride of Abydos," the poet's first attempts at the concoction of anything like a plot, are perhaps the worst constructed tales in any language. In the "Corsair" and "Lara" he succeeds much better. But these poems, magnificent as the Herculean torso in their incompleteness, are still only fragments. They have no beginning; they are without an end. The marvel is that Byron, without any sustained interest arising out of the development of his plot, and with so little to satisfy the reader in the denouement of his stories, should have exercised such a spell over the sensational world.

Byron is more happy with his characters than his plots, though here his success is very limited owing to the lack of variety, and his constitutional tendency to paint nature on the darker side. In the coxcombry of his youth, when surrounded by the gaieties of London society, he delighted to affect the mysterious misanthrope, half pirate and half noble, who reeked his hatred upon men by deeds of rapine and violence, and evinced his love for women by seducing men's daughters, or running away with their wives. Conrad, Alp, Lara, Hafid, and Selim are only so many modifications of this character, differing in some particulars, but all evidently belonging to one family, as so many representatives of the frame of mind in which he loved to indulge. In his incidental characters, Byron was to some extent coerced to go out of himself, and realize his conceptions in the broad field of nature. Lambro, Juan, Don Pedro, Johnson, and Suwarrow are all creations of lifelike force, imparting a rich diversity of

colouring to the narrative they enliven by their vigour. His Cain and Lucifer belong to the same group of portraits as Milton's, stripped only of that terrific grandeur which dazzles while it oppresses the imagination. In "The Island," the bluff qualities of Ben Bunting and Jack Skyscape are well contrasted with the thoughtful effeminacy of Torquil and the hardy nature of the rebellious mutineer. It would seem, then, that the poet's domestic quarrels, which drove him from the bosom of English society, shook out of his nature so much of that cynical affectation as led him in the early stage of his career to identify himself with proscribed outlaws, and paint humanity from its worst models. It is one of the strange inconsistencies of Byron's character, that while petted and fêted in society, the only heroes he could paint were cynical pirates who set all its laws at defiance; and that it was only when society cast him from its bosom, his heart appeared to open to the genial influence of its customs, and he painted men not so much from the monstrous conceits of his imagination, as from the standards of nature.

I do not, however, think that Byron could portray any masculine character, in which his own feelings were not profoundly interested, with such force as to make it a gallery picture worthy of being ranked in the same class with Shakespeare's, or even with Sir Walter Scott's. There was too much of the cynic in his nature to allow him to enter into characters foreign to his own with such hearty sympathy as to see everything from their own point of view, and thus, as it were, from the bases of their nature to allow the peculiarities of his heroes to spring out of the action of circumstances upon the combination of two or three radical principles. This defect is most conspicuous in his dramas, where his characters rather declaim than act, where they impress their mental features on the spectators by set speeches rather than by dealing with the course of events. In his feminine embodiments, Byron's repulsive egotism did not stand in the way, and the consequence

is a group of female portraits not surpassed in their diversity of form and freshness of colour by anything out of dramatic art. Zuleika is all tenderness, Gulbeyaz all fire, Gulnare a combination of both. In Haidée, we have the guileless affections of a young Greek islander developed without the fetters of religious restraint; in Donna Julia, the criminal passion of the matron setting such restraint at defiance. Adeline is a type of the women of *ton*, with no qualities but such as sparkle in the eyes of society. Medora is a type of a woman who has sacrificed society to an affection which swallows up her entire being. Dudu and Aurora Raby are admirable illustrations of those feminine natures which combine abyssmal depths of feeling under the quietest Quaker exterior, but the one chastened by Christian feeling, the other sensualized by the voluptuousness of the East. In these portraits we have a mixture of goodness and evil, but the goodness most predominates. Had Byron painted men as he drew women, his hold upon human sympathies would be far more general. But the blighting cynicism of his nature, which marred his masculine creations, was not always kept in check by his passion for beauty, or by that impassioned spirit of chivalry which arises out of devotion to the other sex; for the poet seldom loses an opportunity of jesting at their passions, and turning their foibles into ridicule. Even here, his uncontrollable habit of satirizing human weakness prevented him from manifesting that hearty sympathy with his object, so essential to place conceptions of feminine loveliness among the loftiest types of ideal creation.

It is owing to this cynical spirit in Byron, arising out of perverted views of humanity, that is to be ascribed much of that mocking spirit which pervades a large portion of his works, and which hindered him from going out of himself, and completely sinking his own idiosyncrasies in the characters he created for others. The feeling which led him to dethrone man from his natural position as the crowning feature of this

planet, induced him to set himself up as the spirit in whose centre all the conflicting lines of the universe seem to meet. The mistake of exalting the powers of evil over those of good, the casualties of chance over the laws of design, was hardly surpassed by thrusting his own petty interests in front of those of general humanity. It was from these two fountains that most of those waters of bitterness flow which corrode all the conceptions of Byron, which destroy their moral aim, and which prevent him from surrounding humanity with those attributes of sweetness, arising out of the harmonious development of its faculties. He could not represent man reposing on the basis of his moral nature, who believed him to be the victim of demoniac influences, or the sport of blind chance. That egotism which made him regard self as the be-all and the end-all here, forced him to intrude his narrow subjectivity into most of his works, and circumscribe within its limits all the range of his creations. We turn over all his pages in vain for an adequate representation of the dignity of man, or the angelic purity of woman. If we are treated to the development of any virtue, such as courage, or hardihood, or constancy of affection, it is as furthering the perpetration of some crime which narrows the sensibilities of our nature. Double murder, incest, adultery, incendiarism, piratical violence, treasons,—such are the subjects which the poet has chosen to surround with the magic of his genius, and to invest their perpetrators with all those brilliant qualities which show that, if he did not actually intend them as models to follow, he certainly designed them to provoke our admiration. The consequence is that man is not represented in his natural position as fitting into the universe of things, but as wrenched out of his sphere, and in conflict with all the elements around him. Turbid misanthropy, the state of feverish excitement in which he lived, his reckless spirit of self-assertion, the feeling of hostility he manifested to the institutions with which he was brought into contact, are reflected in all his meditations, colour

all his views, are more or less conspicuous in every character he conceived and every picture which he drew. Of the world of quiet human nature behind those factitious storms and tempests, into which Wordsworth dropped the plummet of his thoughts, and out of which Shakespeare evoked so many divine lineaments, Byron appears to have known little, and cared less. The unquiet passions in the heart of which he made his home, shut him out from the circle of the domestic affections, and from some of the most interesting features of the social world. They hindered him from realizing the mysterious harmonies between the different faculties of the soul, acting in concert with each other, and the still deeper sympathies in the material universe which exhibit natural phenomena, co-operating together to achieve certain fixed objects by an instinct as divine or more unerring than that in man. Byron, in fact, saw no purpose in the universal fitness of things. The world to him was objectless. Ruin might drive its ploughshare over creation without leaving things much worse than they are. As the universe, so were his works, without an object. They evince no unity of purpose, no moral design. His heroes, like the phenomena of the material world, appear to be driven about very much the sport of blind chance. The poet appears to be the only person who refers everything to his moral consciousness, and raves over that absence of design and beneficence of purpose which he so unceasingly displays himself. There is something sublime in this transfusion of all the social, material, and spiritual phenomena of the universe into the alembic of one mind, and finding all dross; in this summoning of the elements which furnish forth the whole of creation to the bar of his individual judgment, and the repudiation of all as worthless. But this is not the spirit for entering into the soul of things, for appreciating historic events, for weighing human action, or casting characters in the moulds of truth. It would be idle to expect from a state of mind so radically unsound, any ideal glimpses into that state of per-

fection to which man may not unreasonably aspire. Such a class of mind is competent to destroy, but it cannot possibly build up. It may represent with great vigour the darker phases of the past and the present, or the proud and restless agitations of unquiet minds ; but the quieter aspects of humanity are to it a sealed book. The development of any action evolving good out of evil, or the expansion of the social virtues under circumstances calculated to stifle their growth, or the construction of an ideal future exhibiting a practical outlet from the miseries of the present,—of these things it knows nothing. Hence, a wide region of the functions of poetry is excluded from its sphere, though it may be supreme in the rest. Such was the genius of Lord Byron,—of unrivalled ascendancy in the embodiment of passion and in the regions of abstract thought and contemplative grandeur, but singularly wanting in moral purpose, in æsthetic completeness, in that breadth of view which loses sight of no elements of human nature, but considers every object in its proper sphere, and which, instead of balancing all things upon the narrow axis of self, loses sight of its own existence in the ocean of being by which it is surrounded.

I am not disposed to lay any stress on Lord Byron's private circumstances, as affording any palliation for the morbid misanthropy and reckless egotism in which he indulged. These obliquities were, doubtless, produced by youthful excesses, and the early feeling of the emptiness of material enjoyment, the only meteor which seemed to guide his steps through the tortuous mazes of this world. His domestic troubles, which just came in time to confirm this tendency, were also of his own creation. The family estates were, doubtless, unequal to support his rank, but his genius was fully adequate to make up the deficiency. Yet, with a deep assurance of such fact, he chose to marry an heiress of temper incompatible with his own, and a strict zealot in the cause of evangelical principles which he repudiated, in order to recruit his finances, while he was bestowing the copy-

rights of his works on his friends. Even for a considerable period after his marriage, the poet lived in a style of reckless extravagance, without wasting a thought upon his competence to meet his bills. If a man will so far tread opposite to the paths of prudence, if he will place himself in a position so incompatible with duty and common sense, he has no right, when the reckoning-day arrives, to blame the Fates for the evils he has brought upon himself. Had Lord Byron's fortune been ample, he never would have married Miss Millbank. This was the *fons et origo malorum*. He took to his arms a person whom he supposed to be a Christian lamb, and he found her a religious termagant. As his inducement was money, the world will exclaim, he was well punished for his pains. This was the most unpoetical act of his life. But it led to a change of plans and purposes most fruitful in the development of his poetical genius, and the aggrandizement of his fame. It drove him from the allurements of a factitious life into the bosom of nature. It led him to seek out a home among Alpine solitudes, by the lonely ocean, or in cities peopled by the spectres of the past. The change made itself at once felt in pluming his genius for greater flights than it had previously sustained.

Indeed, so far were the private fortunes of the noble bard from imposing trammels on the healthy development of his faculties, that it would be difficult, had those faculties not been warped by selfish indulgence and turbulent passions, to imagine a set of circumstances better calculated to foster their strength, to stimulate their growth, and mature their powers. A boyhood passed upon the mountains of Aberdeenshire, listening to the roar of the distant ocean, brought out in salient contrast the features of the great public school, to which he was subsequently transferred. Here, was gilded conventionality following hard upon the embraces of genuine nature. But the æsthetic pleasures of rural life might have taught him to distrust, if not despise, the hollow prestige of rank, or those flashy distinctions which mere wealth can alone produce for its possessors. The effect, however,

of the display of luxuries which he could not share, was only to sour his disposition, to engender spleen, and to turn his mind upon itself. Cambridge was only a wider Harrow ; but Byron abandoned the intellectual struggles, to drown his cares in the convivialities, of the place. Then came three years of foreign travel through the grandest scenery and most interesting countries in the world ; then three years of London society,—in which he mingled with all classes, from the pugilist and the cock-fighter, to the proudest scions of the aristocracy,—followed by foreign travel again. No career, perhaps, could be imagined better fitted to extend the intellectual horizon of a man, or to lead to any rectification of his æsthetic or moral principles, if he set out with such upon a wrong basis. But Byron does not appear to have availed himself of such experiences to obliterate his misanthropy, or to counteract, to any large extent, that tendency to self-exaggeration, in which he so early indulged. These, though somewhat modified, still continued to be the plague-spots which overshadowed his career, down to his last struggles on the coast of Missolonghi. Neither experience of the world, or converse with nature or himself, could ever check that biting spirit of ridicule,—that sneer at man and his ways, which overflows all his works, and which seem to have been one of the engrained principles of his nature. This precluded him from that logical appreciation of events, the absence of which is so evident in his dramas. It also shut him out from that hearty sympathy with social life, which is the main spring to the successful embodiment of character. The lesson, therefore, to be gleaned from Byron's career is simply this, that there is a close connection between the moral and intellectual faculties of man, and that, if the heart be wrong, the highest gifts of genius will be warped in their development, if not deprived of a large portion of their heritage. Byron as a poet I hold to be superior to Spenser, yet it is very questionable whether, in his influence over the public mind, he is destined to exercise so much influence as Thomson or Cowper, men of far inferior

calibre, but who cultivated the talents they possessed upon a philanthropic basis. Men do not like being told they are hated ; nor are they disposed to submit their necks to establish the empire of a man who regards them as serfs, and himself as the only creature whose destinies are worthy of any consideration. Sovereignty in literature is not like the tyrannies of the lower empire, to be established by force and supported by fear. Praise cannot be extorted. Men will not be coerced into admiration. There can be no passport to permanent and universal masterdom over men's minds, unless that which is raised upon a genuine sympathy with their interests, and a hearty love for their kind. Hence Byron's genius, like Churchill's, is never likely to realize its fair meed of praise. Born with talents fitted to rule mankind, he allowed the sceptre to be grasped by far meaner spirits, who, because they pursued a direct course, have been thought to soar higher, though, in truth, they have not possessed one tithe of his contemplative depth, or his ideal splendour.

Scott.

TO Scott belongs the great merit of popularizing poetry, or, at least, of awakening the national mind to its uses, at a time when the practice of the art appeared to be expiring in the odes of Pye, and when men failed to appreciate the broader lights which were gradually revealing the approach of a glorious dawn. Wordsworth was comparatively obscure, Byron had not appeared, and Campbell was only becoming known, when Scott, diving into the human heart, discovered the secret of gratifying its taste for the mysterious, and interesting all its sympathies in tales of knightly worth, of feudal renown, and perilous adventure, not, indeed, in the hackneyed style of the old romances, but as connected with some decisive event which served to impart an air of reality to his creations. Men saw revived, as in a glass, all the artistic features of the middle ages, just as the last vestige of them had sunk beneath the tide of modern innovation. It was a startling novelty for the new era to have passed before it,—the kings, priests, and warriors and serfs of the old era, separated by impassable barriers, yet jostling each other in promiscuous groups, with living hearts bounding under antiquated armour, with their lavish code of warm fellowship so absurdly illustrated by the blackness of their feuds, with force instead of law as an arbiter, with tournaments instead of commerce as a pursuit, and with moated castles instead of undefended streets as dwelling-places. By bringing the new in contact with the old, men were enabled to trace the same bounding hopes and fears, the same hatreds and

loves, the same rivalries and aspirations, arrayed in different attire, developed under conflicting institutions, which now actuate them, and animating a social structure they had hitherto vainly striven to piece together from the dry investigations of the lawyer, or the tedious narrative of the historian. The poet himself had been led to strike his shaft into this rich mine of art rather by accident than otherwise. The Countess of Dalkeith, infatuated with the elfin legend of "Gilpin Horner," invited Scott, already noted for his ballad minstrelsy, to try his powers upon it. The rich fragment of "Christabel," with which Scott had just made himself familiar, not only suggested both the treatment and the metre, but also made him keenly alive to the feeling of disappointment arising in the reader's mind from applying so splendid a framework to an unfinished subject. The poet, therefore, strove to interweave the magic of his theme with the border feuds of the seventeenth century. The finishing step was to put the whole story into the mouth of an old harper, who, as the last of his race, was supposed to have caught some of the refinements of modern, without losing the simplicity of primitive poetry. Thus sprung into life the "Lay of the Last Minstrel," the first narrative poem which may be said to have taken the English as well as the Scotch public by storm, and which proved as great a favourite in the cottage as in the palace. To the "Lay" succeeded "Marmion" and the "Lady of the Lake," each swelling the triumph of its predecessor. While the epics of Southey lay dead on the shelf, edition after edition of these poems was demanded, with increasing popularity. But, confined to one field, the ablest genius must soon exhaust its combinations, and fatigue his reader, as a singer, by the repetition of the sweetest melodies, with a sense of monotony. As Scott had turned the treatment and metre of "Christabel" to account, so Byron applied Scott's dashing narrative to incidents of a more modern and cosmopolitan character; and the decline of "Rokeby" told its author that the fires of his genius must wane before that of the eccentric

luminary whose blaze was just beginning to flood the horizon. But Scott had fulfilled a double mission. He had not only triumphed himself, but prepared the ground for the triumph of his rivals. His appearance, like that of a meteor, attracted the eyes of all his contemporaries to the study of modern poetry, and stimulated the efforts of genius by bringing home to its convictions the fact, that there was an outside public prepared to appreciate its merits and respond to its exertions.

The poetic genius of Scott, high as it stands, is confined within very narrow limits. He has not the slightest pretension to any merit in the delineation of passion, a sphere in which Byron ruled supreme; neither has he the melting tenderness of Burns, or the fire and animation of Campbell, or the gushing sentimentality of Moore, or the grand abstraction and deep reflectiveness of Wordsworth. In fact, no poet who ever attained eminence, has been so devoid of any of these great characteristics as Scott. Even his most sentimental scenes have a certain hardness of outline, which reminds us of the man who was constantly hammering at the literary anvil, in the bosom of his family, and who never suffered himself to be the victim of any passion which could imperil his worldly sagacity, or his reputation for common sense. With his rivals, poetry was not so much a calling as a vocation. It was part of their nature, which they drunk in with every breath of their life. With Scott it was merely an external mantle, which he put on by accident, and which he cast off when it had served his purpose, and when he found another sphere wherein to reign without a competitor. But, with the millinery of the conventional artist, he has accomplished more than poets of more profound sensibility, by massing together large bodies of men in some animating spectacle, and imparting to their leaders those individual traits of character which kindle the scene into life and activity. His pages glow with the multitudinous groups of Frith's canvas; but, while the painter never gets beyond the material

vulgarity of the 19th century, the poet uses the external embodiment of the 16th, only to throw out, into bolder relief, all the ardour, romance, and enthusiasm which distinguished Scotland during this crisis of her fate. Hence, his triumphs are confined, not merely to one chapter in the drama of human events, but to one page in the history of his country. Even his marvellous delineations of scenery rarely cross the Tweed. The truth is, Scott wrote about no subject in which his heart was not profoundly interested, or with the details of which he was not perfectly familiar. This is the real secret of his success. He idolized the wild scenery of his native country, and has described it in imperishable language. His love for the mysterious led him early to haunt ruined castles, and re-people them with the phantoms of their past existence. Hence the study of antiquarian lore became a necessity of his being. He read up old chronicles, devoured legendary tales, tracked to its source every heraldic distinction, studied feudal customs, until chivalry became to him the only real thing in the world which had any meaning. When, therefore, the spark of poetry kindled his soul, it was only to light up, in one effulgent blaze, the knowledge thus acquired. He could sing only of ancient feuds, of magical enchantments, of mailed knights bent upon feats of war or gallantry, of gentle dames and cowed priests crossing each other's paths in the intrigues of love and state craft, of errant damsels in moated castles, perplexed by the claims of rival chieftains; but this was done with a brilliancy of effect, with a splendour of colouring, with a fidelity to nature down to the most minute detail, which has never been surpassed, and with a truthful accuracy which simulated life in every degree of rank, and which may be said to have generalized history. Had Scott allowed his genius free bridle over a wider field; had he chosen subjects for his muse from a period in which wandering harpers could find no place, he would have lost rank in Parnassus. It was only by concentrating his poetic powers upon the subject he knew most

about, that he was enabled to place his name among the first-class poets of his epoch.

Scott was too sedulously employed in reconstructing the past, to enlighten the present, or to anticipate the future. The reader will not get from him the slightest glimpse into man's loftier destinies, or the least glimmering of light upon any of the perplexing enigmas which are at present haunting humanity. Scott, like Moore, was too objective to infuse philosophy into any of his themes ; but, though each looked at man from opposite poles of political thought, the reflective poetry of both is tinged with the same hues of melancholy. The sadness of Moore, however, appears to spring from the decay of ephemeral hopes, and from the fleeting nature of earthly joys ; while the melancholy of Scott is that of the minstrel, who feels that society is entering upon new and untried paths, and breaking up all the old landmarks which connected life with chivalrous feeling and romantic sentiment. The perfection of social existence with Scott, was that presented by the feudal lord surrounded by his band of dependants, who, in return for his protection, returned to him willing service and spontaneous homage. The study of chivalry appears to have led him to value men according to their heraldic distinctions. He was too aristocratic in his feelings to have much sympathy with the spirit of his age, which was gradually levelling the barriers between the higher and lower ranks of society. Other poets might take waggoners or pirates for their subject, but Scott, in verse, would make a hero of no man who had not an emblazoned scutcheon, or who could not trace his ancestry back to the Conquest. He moves among courts and camps, with the air of a man born to companion nobles and princes. To him, the great mass of the people seemed only of importance so far as they augment the greatness, and afford scope for the benevolence, of their masters. The poet had a capacious heart as well as a large head, and sought to indulge the generosity, which distinguished his nature, by the same acts which gratified his ambition.

Scott, therefore, arrayed the pride of ancestry against the power of intellect. Byron reversed the process. Both poets acted in singular contrariety to the position from which they set out in life. Byron with his proud Norman abbey and lordly escutcheon, seemed never so happy as when he could forget both. The aim of Scott's life was to possess himself of those aristocratic appendages, which his rival, on the threshold of his career, tossed from him with scornful depreciation. Byron snapt asunder the links which bound him to the past, to live in the present ; Scott tore himself from the present, to live in the past. Byron, though an aristocrat, enlisted the fervour of his muse, and even drew his sword, in favour of liberty ; Scott, though a commoner, exhausted all his powers in the embellishment of villanage and feudal dependence. It would be idle to expect from one treading so opposite to the tendencies of his times, any light for the guidance of humanity ; and Scott's sympathies were too deeply entangled with the old elements of society, to look forward with hope to new combinations.

It is only, then, as the reviver of the mediæval aspects of his country, that Scott, as a poet, is entitled to claim our regard. He is the bard of Scotch chivalry, and nothing more. And even in this limited sphere, his triumphs are confined to narrative poetry. As a lyrist, he was too deficient in passion and earnestness of feeling to challenge exclusive attention to his merits ; and he has shown great judgment in interweaving his songs with his narrative, which imparts to them an interest they would not otherwise possess. For Scott always contrived for his lyrics a brilliant setting, in order that they might reflect light upon his scenic delineations, while these, in turn, imparted to them those hues which soften down much of their original harshness. A song scattered from a harp's strings, by moonlight, over the waters of a silver mere, or the ditty of a maiden arresting the steps of her lover in a wild glen, or a refrain in a banditti's cave or baronial hall, foreshadowing the glare of the

impending strife on the morrow,—each possess an interest to which the isolated lyric can lay no claim whatever. In fact, if the best of Scott's songs be taken out of the magnificent framework of his narrative, they will be found far below those of Moore and Campbell on kindred subjects, while a considerable number of them are not much above mediocrity.

It speaks much in favour of Scott's good sense, that he should have restricted his efforts to that department of poetry in which his faculties best qualified him to shine. Necessity has no law, and men can only succeed in that walk for which nature has fitted them. The poet could only supply his want of abstract grandeur, of mental introspection, of profound pathos, by thrilling incident, by startling contrasts of situation, by grand scenic effects, by powerful delineation of character; and these could not, without the accompaniment of intense feeling, be combined with success except in the narrative poem. To say that Scott combined these qualities in a more effective manner than had been accomplished before, is praise of a high character; but it is praise to which he is justly entitled. By blending truth with fiction, he has imparted to his pictures an air of reality which, considering their relations to the weird world, surpasses that achieved by any other poet who has ventured to throw aside the curtains of the material universe.

In intermingling weird superstitions with his narrative, Scott was true to the character of the times he was endeavouring to depict; but in confounding these with the whole machinery of the supernatural then existing, the poet committed an error which should not be overlooked in any fair estimate of his powers. Scott's intellect, like Byron's, was of that broad character to require for its exhibition nothing less than the reproduction of an age; but Byron had his triumphs in other branches of his art, whereas Scott's merits are to be tried by his success in this sphere exclusively. When, therefore, the poet sacrifices that broad spirit of Christianity permeating all the institutions of chivalry to a few wild legends, he dwarfs the

leading element of the age, and substitutes an excrescence, springing out of the luxuriance of belief, for the vital principle generating life-blood at the core. But this mistake the poet was hurried into by the objective bent of his genius. Of the abyssmal depths of religious feeling and the deeper mysteries of the human heart, Scott knew very little, and discoursed less. Hence, while the martial tendencies of the age are thrown into glaring prominence, all the glimpses we get of that belief which piled up our huge cathedrals, which threw Europe with unsheathed sabre upon the throat of Asia, which resurrectionized art in Italy, are one or two monkish processions calculated to call up a smile on the face of the greenest Ritualist by the complete manner in which the prescriptions of the Latin rubric are set at defiance. The velvet-bound breviary and Benedictine habit of Lady Clare are but poor exemplifications of that spirit which led a crowd of delicately-trained women to maintain a constant warfare, behind conventual grills, with their own nature within, and the pomps of life without, cheerlessly wasting upon prison solitudes that beauty intended to illuminate the atmosphere of busy life. In not diving beneath the surface, in giving us a mere travesty of the external embodiment in which this intensity of religious feeling had wrapped itself, Scott so far was untrue to the spirit of the age he would represent. That the poet, however, has raised the ghost of chivalry from the tomb in such a manner as to interest the public in its lineaments, is sufficiently evident from the popularity which his works still command. But the phantom does not glare upon us in its religious aspects, simply because the poet has been too intent upon colouring its integuments rather than making them the medium for flashing forth its soul. It is very rare to find an author who, like Shakespeare, can instruct and amuse in equal proportion; and Scott, out of an anxious desire to gratify the low standard of the popular taste, stooped from the lofty requirements of his art. His was not the bold genius which could reconstruct an age, with all that breadth of design and matchless

symmetry of parts as to lead the public mind to forget its present baubles in the overpowering sense of joy felt in the delineation.

In construction of plot, Scott's merits are not of the highest order. He was too intent upon the gorgeous contrasts and picturesque grouping of the parts to attend to the completeness of the whole. But merit, which he could only share with the novelist, seemed to him very secondary, compared with the enhancement of the higher qualities which are the exclusive heritage of the poet. Hence, with the single exception of the "Lady of the Lake," the juncture and ligaments of Scott's fables will not bear minute analysis. In "Marmion," the main incidents of the story are treated in a fragmentary fashion, and the reader is left to connect the broken links as he best may, while the interest turns upon a multitude of improbable occurrences, which require the infantine stage of credulity to realize. In the first, as well as in the last of his tales, there are two distinct parts having no natural connection with each other. The achievements of the wizard Scott with the adventures of his magical book, had no more to do with the border feuds of Howard and Douglas, than the perplexing loves of Lord Ronald with the fates of Robert Bruce; nor has the poet succeeded in moulding the alien elements so closely as to make one spring out of the other, or even had the poor merit of assigning to each a sphere proportionate to its dignity. But in both the "Lay" and the "Lord of the Isles" he has dwarfed the leading event into an episode, and exalted what ought to have been an episode into the leading event. In "Rokeby" we have unity of action, but probability of incident is set more resolutely at defiance, and the thread of the story more hopelessly entangled than in "Marmion." That the poet should make us forget such defects by the magic of his treatment, is one of the triumphs of his art. The individual scenes are so artistically finished, the minor incidents are so elaborated, that we lose sight of the incongruities, marring the framework of the design, in the lavish shower of beauties flung with reckless profusion at our feet.

It is in the embellishment of his plots by graphic incidents, as well as in his matchless delineation of character, that Scott's powers as a poet are most conspicuous. He knew how to crowd his canvas with those lights and shades which have the effect of conveying the poet's creations, with all their freshness and reality, into the reader's heart. The picture of delicate beauty confronting giant strength, of the quiet repose of nature disturbed with the shaggy panoply of arms, of the silence and darkness of midnight broken by the war-whoop of the trooper or the torch of the incendiary,—these and other kindred points of contrast, the poet brings out with a minuteness of touch which sets up the entire scene with all its gorgeous diversity of colouring before our eyes, while the faintest reverberation of its sounds echo on the ear. The explorations of Deloraine in Melrose Abbey, the battle-scene in "Marmion," the adventure of Fitz James with Roderic Dhu, and the moonlight etchings of all his pieces, are hardly to be surpassed by anything of the same kind in modern poetry. When, in addition to these excellences, we get a story so faultless in construction as the "Lady of the Lake," the author has achieved the highest success that could be attained in a narrative poem embodying the external rather than the internal features of his subject.

In the delineation of masculine character, Scott leaves few things to be desired; but he is far more happy in his portraiture of men than in that of women. I suppose we must ascribe it to the gallantry of his nature, that he thought every woman an angel by right of her sex. His heroines from Margaret to Matilda, or from Lady Clare to Isabel, are all perfect in character, and therefore very imperfect in execution. Perhaps, there was some charm in the middle ages which made virtue the never-failing appendage of weakness, and vice of strength. But Matilda was far removed from the times of Margaret or Lady Clare; yet they only need exchange costumes, to exchange places with each other. The Benedictine gown

and the breviary would have become Ellen quite as well as the Scotch plaid. Constance is the only one of his heroines who displays a spark of fire; yet this is in connection with guilt so revolting that imagination shrinks from uniting it with the soft beauty of a delicate woman. Scott would appear to have produced his feminine creations as types for the study of boarding-school girls; and when he went in for goodness or frailty, laid on the colour in order to deter or allure as heavily as possible. Nor am I without a suspicion, from the popularity of his works, that the consequent tameness of his heroines has not produced its results in much of the mawkish and monotonous insipidity we meet with in many of the women of the present day. How different are the Medoras, the Parasinas, the Zuleikas, the Haidées of Lord Byron—beings starting into life with all the distinctness which appertain to different climes, yet as true to nature as if they had been chiseled out of a block of granite by Praxiteles, mingling their spiritual essence with the fiery glow of desire, with all that we know of heaven, in their eyes, and all that we feel of voluptuous passion, on their lips. The fact is, no man can paint women who has not a gushing well-spring of tenderness in himself. And the absence of the quality which Scott wanted to make him a first-class lyrist, was painfully evinced, when Scott sat down to limn the features of any of the more interesting half of the human race.

The male characters of Scott have an individuality to which his female embodiments cannot pretend, and the wonder is that he, who drew women so badly, should have sketched men so well. In all his pieces his heroes stand out with a distinctness of outline in their bolder features, and with a peculiarity of tinge in the lighter and more evanescent traits of character, which make them not only life-like themselves, but out of the light of their own reality, to shed the quickening beams of animation upon all with whom they are brought in contact. The heavy but daring Deloraine,—the courtly but fearless

Cranistoun,—the soldier-monk, whose wan features occasionally gleam with the fires of his crusading days ;—the fiery Dacre, and the pacific Howard, each appear in the “Lay” to act as the counterfoil to the other, while they remain quite distinct from the personages to whom Scott introduces us, anywhere else. The character of Roderick Dhu with its conflicting traits of savage cruelty in peace, and its delicate susceptibilities of honour during war, is a study in itself. Sensuousness is blended in James, with the silken graces and airy blandishments of a king who lives in the gaities of others ; in “Marmion,” with the hardened scepticism and testy disposition of a knight, who lives only in the aggrandisement of himself. These diversities of character, springing out of the same passion, operating upon different temperaments, are not the result of laboured effort. For Scott, though elaborately minute in the specification of the dress and equipage of his heroes, though he will suspend his narrative until he has settled the martlets on their shields, and told us whether the field of their scutcheons is argent, or d’or, when he comes to their character, seizes at once upon the master passion, and, by two or three leading strokes, stamps the man’s history on his face, in hues which impart a meaning to the least of his actions. Scott’s painstaking description of articles of attire, which occasionally has the air of an inventory, though frequently censured, was to some extent necessary, to impart an appearance of reality to those few touches on which he relied for breathing animation into figures decorated with so much skill. But here, again, the aristocratic feelings of the poet prevailed over the claims of his art. Scott, rarely wastes his descriptive powers upon any characters, but those who compose the cream of society. A man below the grade of squire is not fit for elaborate notice. He selects, in his poems, for the subject of full-length portraiture, none but warriors, knights, princes, abbots, and lords. But it cannot be overlooked that this limited range of selection, which would have been fatal to any artistic representation of modern society,

is not out of character with the representation of a feudal community, in which the fate of the people was merged in the fortunes of their chiefs. Scott's vassals and retainers, if summarily disposed of in his pictures, occupy a position analogous to that which they hold in the state of society he describes; and the characters of their chiefs are so well delineated, that the age to which both belonged, at least in its martial aspects, though long since calcined to dust, is made to revive again with all the animation of yesterday.

It is owing to his success in breathing into the martial relics of chivalry the spirit of human life, that Scott is entitled to a high place in narrative poetry. If he wants the passion and fire of Moore and Campbell, his pictures are more true to nature than either. His tales have much more incident, and his heroes stride before us with an earnestness endued with the vitality of history, rather than with the sentimentality which speaks of the atmosphere of romance. Other narrative poets have simply confined their attention to the illustration of some particular virtue, or the development of one definite action. Chaucer, Spenser, Byron, and Scott, have alone endeavoured to reproduce an age, by weaving the tissues of many single destinies into one magnificent delineation of human life. They only have unrolled the myriad-minded tapestry of the Fates before us, in depicting the conjoint lives of a generation. Though Scott's canvas embraces a far greater number of groups than that of any of his three rivals, he is decidedly the last in rank. He is far less ideal than Spenser, less comprehensive than Byron, less truthful than Chaucer, less original than Crabbe. Even Burns excels him in reproducing, fresh, as it were, from the mint, the lineaments of nature, though "Tam o'Shanter" is so brief a sketch, that it is hardly fair to Scott to institute a comparison. His words seldom pierce the heart; the passions never obey his call. If Scott seems, however, to shine with steadier light in narrative poetry than most of his contemporaries, it is because he excels them in creative

force, in the breadth of his designs, in the vivid grouping of external objects, in portraying critical phases of character under striking situations, rather than in deep feeling, profound thought, or in those bold flights of imagination which fire the soul with a feeling of sublimity. To Byron and Wordsworth, his general inferiority is beyond question ; in respect of genuine poetic fire, he is beneath Burns, Moore, and Campbell, while he is superior to any of his rivals in the creation of incidents, in the manipulation of events, and the grouping of his characters, with a view to secure that dramatic interest so necessary to the success of a narrative poem. If he had not so great a genius as some of his contemporaries, he was possessed, to a greater degree than any, of that hard-working talent which is able in the eyes of the million to magnify genius into thrice its actual dimensions. And nowhere is that talent capable of being turned to more account than in the department on which Scott lavished all his strength. But artistic talent, even here, would not have sufficed to account for Scott's eminence, without some creative power, and both combined have equally contributed to place him in the rear of the first group of narrative poets, at some distance from those of the foremost rank, who may, nevertheless, feel proud of his companionship, as the reviver of one of the most interesting fragments in the history of nations.

Moore.

IT will be generally found that a poet's social habits, his peculiar disposition, and general conduct furnish a clue to his works. As both derive their colouring from the same source, each reflects light on the other. A man's actions impart their tints to his speculative thoughts in a thousand ways, which are often invisible to himself. They afford a key to the solution of their character. If this is so of other poets, it is especially true of Moore. There was a want of hearty genuineness in the man ; a substitution of conventional feeling for the unaffected simplicity of nature ; a studied urbanity of manner which, out of a vain desire to court the great, led him to damp the fervour of the fires within, — a disposition to play two parts, often mutually repelling, which weakened the spontaneous ebullitions of his nature. He was a Catholic, and yet educated his children in the Protestant communion. He was a patriot, self-exiled from his country, which he seldom cared to revisit. He was a father, most loving in his professions of attachment for the domestic hearth, and yet spending all his evenings in the glittering circles of fashionable society. He was a sturdy child of independence, while he accepted a pension, and hankered after place ; * and a generous sympathiser with the best interests

* “ Neither am I sorry for having come to Bermuda. The appointment is respectable, and was considered a matter of great patronage among those who had the disposal of it, which alone is sufficient to make it a valuable step towards perferment.”—*Letter to Mrs.* ——— “ Moore's Journal of Correspondence,” vol. i. p. 151.

of his species, while passing his life in the cold shade of the Whig aristocracy. But the poet has enshrined his excuses in the song "Oh, blame not the bard," supposed to be sung by a minstrel of the ninth century, in so plaintive a manner as to make even a Fenian overlook his delinquencies.

Hence, wherever the poet went, he evinced few congenial sympathies with man out of the pale of polished society. In Bermuda, according to Shakespeare, the birthplace of Ariel,—whither, I suppose, his patrons sent him, because his muse had some resemblance to that flighty and indefatigable sylph,—he was fascinated with the climate, but had little taste for the inhabitants. He found the ladies more lavish of their affections than their charms were calculated to make enjoyable; while he treats their husbands as patient cuckolds, who relinquished, with good grace, their exclusive right to privileges which were not worth possessing. Hence, the ancient philosopher, who held that, after this life, men are changed into mules, and women into turtles, might have seen this metamorphosis accomplished in Bermuda. But it is in the United States that the peculiar traits of Moore's character are most prominently brought out. Burke had seen imaged, in the rising Republic, the future glories of the human race. The poet himself tells us he departed for America with the bounding hope of embracing in that State the divinity of a Utopian commonwealth. But he was shocked to find, instead, a loose strumpet distributing her favours, according to the dictates of political corruption, among a mob of coarse barbarians. Even our transatlantic sisters, than whom there are no fairer specimens of feminine beauty, are represented as haggard as the state they inhabit:—

Like the nymphs of her own withering clime,
She is olden in youth, she is blasted in prime.

America, in the view of the Irish statesman, could have no fairer handmaidens for her spousals with Liberty than Trade and Commerce. But, in the eyes of the Irish poet, industrial

pursuits had vulgarised the union, and rendered the offspring plebeian. In this flattering manner did Moore speak of the respectable population of America :—

The motley dregs of every distant clime,
Each blast of anarchy, and taint of crime
Which Europe shakes from her perturbed sphere.

The Americans, according to him, had acquired freedom, not on account of any love of independence, but simply to make George III. a bankrupt. The President of the day, who happened to have a favourite negress, gives Moore an opportunity of indulging his peculiar vein :—

The weary statesman, for repose, has fled
From halls of council to his negro's shed,
Where blest he woos some black Aspasia's grace,
And dreams of Freedom in his slave's embrace.

The aspirations of the enlightened population of the western continent were merged into the assumed crime of one man, in order that they might be treated as a brute race, without the slightest notions of decency or refinement.

In fact, Moore dwelt too much on the surfaces of things ; he was too fond of gaudy glitter and ornament to be a deep thinker, capable of diving into the heart of social phenomena, or of interesting himself in any phase of humanity not surrounded with the vulgar pomps of civilization. Want of refinement, with Moore, was a cardinal sin, which cut him off from congenial sympathy with three-fourths of the human species. With the nymphs of May Fair, with the belles of the drawing-room, with those circles of society which can invest nature with all the resources of art, Moore's heart beat in genuine unison. He could also appreciate, as well as any man, beautiful scenery interspersed with rock and wood gleaming with cascades,—here expanding into lakes, there contracting into rivers,—and even with towering mountains, provided they stood out in dark

masses against a roseate sky. But if his fellow-creatures did not deal largely in cosmetics, or if the landscape simply consisted of

Mountains bare,
Bare trees, and the green fields,

both one and the other were more likely to provoke his censure than elicit his admiration. Nature, as well as society, required a brilliant setting to engage Moore's attention. He appears to have taken an interest in both only in proportion to the amount of gilding with which they were embellished ; and it is to be feared he preferred all the foibles and lying vanities of conventional life, entrenched beneath a large array of upholstery, to the humbler virtues, without. It is this lack of clear insight into humanity, that causes the poet to make up for deep touches of nature, by false glitter and overstrained refinement ; it is this incapacity of identifying himself with man's loftiest destinies, which leads him to touch with lame wing the heights of philosophy, and to be thoroughly at home in no other region than the wanton bower of love. But this passion has such wide-encircling ramifications, stretches over such an infinity of joys and sorrows, so completely colours with its hues all the objects and vitalizes all the energies of human life, that to be master of its emotions is to be sovereign of a universe.

It cannot be denied that Moore, in awakening and gratifying the sensuous and more emotional sympathies of our nature, has few rivals, though in this department he is more graceful than energetic, more tender than pathetic, too inclined to sport with imagery caught from the fleeting aspects of nature than to dwell in the reflective regions of the human breast. Hence, the impressions he excites are rather evanescent than durable. The structures he builds up are not made of solid and permanent materials, but of filagree-work and decorative ornament, which rather startle the reader by brilliancy of effect than overpower him with emotional grandeur and profound sentiment. There

is plaintive melancholy, deep tenderness, exquisite sensibility, voluptuous passion, veiled with a spirituality which takes off all its coarseness, and a fancy ever on the wing to ransack nature for illustrations, till the most distant objects are rendered tributary to the brilliant setting of the sentiments he wishes to convey. I know, indeed, no poet so prolific of comparisons calculated to sculpture his ideas on the mind, or so fitted to etherealize the most sensuous images, by the lightness of touch with which they are treated, or the spiritual aspects under which they are introduced. These embellishments being drawn from the most poetic objects in the universe, reflect, in their ever-shifting phases, variegated light upon the sentiments they are intended to illustrate, until in the pictures of the poet, the shadows of the real world are invested with the magical tints of ideal creation. The sparkling freshness of the thought, combined with the perfect adaptability of the image, like two burnished mirrors, multiply and interfuse each other's hues with such brilliancy, that the spiritual snatches from the material its distinctness of outline, while the material imbibes from the spiritual that light which dazes the reader with splendour. But as every perfection lavished in excess produces corresponding disadvantages, so this exuberance of fancy cloyes from its very monotony of sweetness. It, to a great extent, emasculates the poet's thoughts by breaking their continuity. The shaft of reflection cannot strike deep into the strata of his subject, while the writer is seeking for flowers to adorn the surface. Poverty of conception is frequently hidden under a lavish display of ornament, too often introduced to conceal the absence of more substantial appendages; as in those nymphs who endeavour to supply themselves with symmetrical figures by millinery devices, or in those pasteboard creations of Hercules which we meet with on gala-days, when, through a judicious arrangement of drapery and flowers, weakness is arrayed in all the sumptuous prodigality of strength.

In narrative poetry, Moore has succeeded even better than could have been expected from one whose talents lay in the

objective and sentimental sphere. "Lallah Rookh" presents the perfection of panoramic scenery, dashed off with the ease of a consummate artist. The imagery is as gorgeous and imposing as the versification is melodious, or as the similes are dazzling and profuse. Feats of daring as heroic as ever tempted a patriot's sword, are combined with scenes of tenderness as soft as ever melted a lover's breast; and the whole is pervaded with that languid voluptuousness, which, in the East, is so beautiful as to be allied with spirituality. If, in these regions, he fails to exhibit the sustained sweetness and natural imagery of Burns and Spenser, or the creative genius of Scott or Chaucer, his love scenes have more lusciousness, his landscapes are lit up with a splendour quite as ideal, while he hurries us along with more dashing vigour and impetuosity. But, even here, the reader cannot but feel the want of human interest, owing to the absence of lifelike portraiture of character, and the attempt to supply the places of natural incident by startling denouements and gorgeous contrasts. It is the misfortune of Moore, that even in the best of his triumphs, by his lavish style of ornament and his deficiency in the subjective element, he reminds us too frequently of the metamorphoses of the stage, and makes us feel he is producing his effects by theatrical display and scenic illusions. Notwithstanding these impressions, the "Fire Worshippers," and the "Paradise and the Peri," which are by far the best of the Arabian tales, would be sufficient to entitle Moore to a high place as a narrative poet. In the one, there is great fire and energy; in the other, exquisite elaboration of detail and enamel perfection of finish. For construction of plot, for the graceful windings and sudden surprises of the story, for the succession of striking tableaux, each increasing in splendour, and for the dramatic interest sustained by keeping the figure of Hafed draped to the close, the "Fire Worshippers" may rival any other poem, of similar extent, in the language. The boarding of Zelica's vessel during a tempest, in which the storm of the elements is outrivalled by the fury of man, is matchless

both in vigour and execution. The description of the Gheber's retreat, for grandeur and sublimity, is also quite equal to any similar picture in the language :—

Around its base, the bare rocks stood,
Like naked giants, in the flood,
As if to guard the gulf across ;
While on its peak, that brav'd the sky,
A ruined temple tower'd so high,
That oft the sleeping albatross
Struck the wild ruin with her wing,
And from her cloud-rock'd slumbering
Started—to find man's dwelling there,
In her own silent fields of air !
Beneath, terrific caverns gave
Dark welcome to each stormy wave
That dash'd like midnight revellers in ;—
And such the strange, mysterious din,
At times throughout those caverns roll'd,—
And such the fearful wonders told
Of restless sprites imprison'd there,
That bold were Moslem, who would dare,
At twilight hour, to steer his skiff
Beneath the Gheber's lonely cliff.*

Had Moore only written this poem, he would have been entitled, on account of the touches of imaginative passion it contains, and the ease with which he attains the sublime, to rank in the same class with the first of his contemporaries, though, from the prevalence of the ornamental over the substantial features of narrative poetry, at a respectable distance from the first group. Of the “Veiled Prophet” and the “Light of the Harem,” I cannot say anything like so much. Mokanna's cruelty was too revolting, and Nourmahal's pettishness too trifling, to supply the foundations of a story fit to be arrayed in all the glittering effulgence of the poet's fancy. But, with all the drawbacks of

* “Fire Worshippers,” p. 10.

the theme, I do not think Moore has done justice to either. A poet whose invention was more prolific would have made the poverty of his materials only act as a foil for the display of the splendours which such poor materials were destined to assume, when lit up by the flame of his genius. But, if we take away the female portraits, and the exquisite lyrics with which he has enriched these productions, the rest of the piece collapses like those gorgeous sky-cities pellucid with flame, pillared and buttressed upon western clouds, at even, when the light which illumined them has been withdrawn. Moore, skilful jeweller as he was, in his smaller pieces, was not competent, like Wordsworth, to supply deficiency of incident in narrative, by individual traits of character, or by startling reflections; and when his footlights do not fall on the scenic effects of melodramatic action, the power of the master is not fully displayed.

It is this lack of variety of incident, of some common ground-plot to serve as a substratum for weaving the stories into each other, which deprives the "Loves of the Angels" of that brilliancy of treatment which, doubtless, the subject would, otherwise, have received. The separate stories themselves would, as narrative poems, be entitled to high consideration, as the productions of a poet of second class merit in this branch of the art, but coming from Moore, the merits of the narration are lost sight of in the splendour of his Oriental imagery, and in the still more glittering showers of diamond lustre which his lyrics flash upon the world. These stories unite deep pathos with exquisite tenderness to an extent, perhaps, never reached before in our language. But Moore erred in choosing oblique narration for the cast of the two first pieces; and, as he completely fails in the denouement of each, he leaves the third story without any denouement at all. The monotony of the passion, unrelieved by incidents of a sterner sort, is also unvaried by difference of character in the angels and their lovers, who all appear very much as chips of the same block. Moore, if we

may judge from his female portraits, seems to have adopted the absurd opinion of Pope,

Most women have no characters at all,
and to have painted them much after the receipt of Diderôt,
that is, with a pen dipped in the colours of the rainbow, with
the hues softened by the down off butterfly's wings, taking, as
the general substratum of the character, Pope's couplet,

A very heathen in the carnal part,
And yet a right good Christian at the heart.

For Moore's Leas, Namas, Lilises, as well as his Hindas,
Zelicas, and Nourmahals, while uniting every external perfection,
comprise

— A union, which the hand
Of Nature kept for them alone,
Of everything most playful, grand,
Voluptuous, spiritual, bland
In angel-natures and their own.*

Each indiscriminately may be addressed in the language Rubi
applies to his mistress,—

One in whose love I felt were given
The mixed delights of either sphere,
All that the spirit seeks in heaven,
And all the senses burn for here.†

In the same manner he paints Hinda,—

Fill'd with all youth's sweet desires,
Mingling the meek and vestal fires
Of other worlds, with all the bliss,
The fond, weak tenderness of this.
A soul, too, more than half divine,
Where, through some shades of earthly feeling,
Religion's soften'd glories shine,
Like light through summer foliage stealing.‡

* "Loves of the Angels," second Angel's story.

† *Ibid.*

‡ The "Fire Worshippers."

It is this want of individual traits in his portraits, and his making his characters a mere bundle of abstract qualities, which is the cardinal defect of Moore's narrative poetry, and which appears to the greatest disadvantage in the "*Loves of the Angels*," as this poem has no other element calculated to throw out each story in vivid distinctness. Yet, with all the imperfections that niggard invention, lack of incident, and sameness of character throw over this performance; the variegated gems of fancy which light up each page; the subdued melancholy thrown, like a silken veil, over the most voluptuous of the scenes; and, above all, the lyrical charms with which many of those scenes are invested, flooding each with melody which haunts the soul like echoes from a loftier sphere,—all combine to stamp upon these productions the ineffaceable marks of genius. As a whole, they need not fear comparison with Byron's drama upon the same theme, though Byron, as he always does, went in for realistic treatment. In "*Heaven and Earth*," Byron is inferior to himself. In the "*Loves of the Angels*," Moore is only inferior to his subject. In the one, all the harsher features of the picture are brought out, till we are repelled by their sternness; in the other, all its tenderness, till we are cloyed by their sweetness. Byron triumphs in his conception; Moore, in his execution. The descriptions of the latter are too spiritualized; of the former, too earthy. The angels of Moore are weak libertines, who sacrifice everything to pleasure; those of Byron, haughty spirits, who, rather than abandon their mistresses, embrace perdition out of a sentiment of honour. In Moore, love is not merely the chief, but the solitary subject of his canvas. In Byron, it is only an episode faintly imaged in the background, while the fore-part of the picture is taken up with man in all his irregular passions, defying the Deity about to inflict upon him the summary chastisement of the deluge. Had not Byron been fettered by his Greek notions of the drama, he would, doubtless, have kindled the blackness of his picture into lights and shades, before the splendour of whose contrasts even Moore's

glittering radiance would have paled. But as it is, his performance only commands attention as a work of art; while the production of his less gifted contemporary, interlacing itself with the affections, enchains our sympathies as a work of passionate interest.

But it is as a lyrical poet that Moore has achieved his highest triumphs, and he had the good sense to devote the greater part of his energies to a sphere in which nature had most fitted him to shine. To some extent, he was fortunate in belonging to a country, more than any other in Europe, steeped in misfortune, and abounding in popular airs, wherein, as it were, lie enshrined the records of its joys and sorrows, the triumphs of its wit, the lament over its broken aspirations, the trumpet tones of its victories, and the wail of its defeats. Most of these airs were either adapted to songs previously written, or, as was the case with the early minstrels, both the tune and the words were struck out under the spontaneous impulses of momentary inspiration. But such is the superiority of music over language, that, in a great many cases, posterity found itself in the position of the shepherd in Virgil, who could recall the tune while the words were forgotten :

Numeros memini si verba tenerem.

It was to wed these melodies to appropriate words, which were joined to trivial sentiments, or floating about without any, like the ghosts of past songs, that Moore addressed himself; and even envy cannot deny that he executed the task with a grace and a mellifluous ring of versification which makes the tune rather seem a reflex of the words, and not the words an embodiment of the melody. The wide range of sentiment embraced by the poet, enables him to embody, in the composition of a few brief years, the airs which it had taken centuries to accumulate, with a diversity of feeling quite equal to the shifting fortunes of his country, and the ever-varying temperament in which the national music had its birth. The tone of

despondency succeeding to that of defiance, the voice of melancholy mingling with that of gladness, as the freshness of hope brightens into fulfilment or fades into vacuity, the levities of truth and the more permanent realities of sadness, chasing each other with the ever-varying fluctuations of sunlight and shadow ; the violence of passion melting in the embraces of pity ; tumult dying away into the soft languor of repose, and all the alternations of joy or sorrow pouring their confluent tides on the confines of youth and age, and rolling their diversified currents through the lover's heart, or the patriot's breast,—each of these are reflected in the poet's page with an impress which wants nothing of reality, except the removal of that soft tinge of spirituality which surrounds all his productions with a haze of splendour.

Whether we regard the variety, or extent, or the tenderness, or sweetness, or the united excellence of his lyrics, it would be difficult to name a poet whom Moore does not excel. But conscious where his strength lay, the poet revels in his flights of fancy too far ; he indulges in his vein of voluptuousness too much, to impart that chastened simplicity and vigour to his conceptions, which they most needed to set them in their best light. The reckless prodigality with which he scatters his polished gems over his thoughts, prevents him from investing them with that depth and individual speciality of colouring, which they frequently want to wing them to the heart. Hence, Burns excels him in intensity of passion, in deep pathos, as well as in those descriptions of character or scenery which bring the mind in contact with the person depicted, or surround it with the objects they would represent. Moore bewails the broken fortunes of his country much like an effeminate Greek of Athens who wants to luxuriate in the palaces of his oppressor ; while Burns sings of independence and liberty with the native fervour of a Caledonian, who cares nothing for life beyond his own naked mountains. Moore is seldom an Irishman, Burns always a Scotchman. Both poets—the one in the roadside

cabaret, the other in the patrician's drawing-room, are supreme in their respective spheres. But, superior as Burns undoubtedly is on his own ground, he sinks somewhat from his height, when his lyrics are merged into the larger circle embraced by the productions of his more artistic successor, who could pass from a devotional hymn, or from an eulogium on Fox, to an imitation of Catullus or to a chorus fit for a bacchanalian revel, and pause on his way to interpose a coarse satire upon legitimacy or priestcraft ; who could, while reclining on the luxurious sofa of a Court beauty, indite a languishing sonnet which might charm the fastidious taste of Madame de Pompadour, and then suddenly start up with a soul-awakening tribute to liberty, destined to keep for ever alive the fires of independence in the breasts of his countrymen.

CHAPTER X.

ALEXANDRINE POETS.

Shelley.

SHELLEY is the only poet who appeared to form a theory of the universe perfectly consistent with itself, and to have acted up to the convictions so formed, in defiance alike of the warning of his friends, and the menaces of society. There was no sophistry in his character. He maintained his boyish ingenuousness, untainted by a single shadow of hypocrisy, all through his life. He wore his heart upon his sleeve for every fool to peck at. His thoughts were reflected in his acts; and might be scanned through his features as clearly as the tints of the over-arching sky may be traced in the depths of the crystal lakes beneath. As he felt, so he sang. There was, consequently, greater unity between his intellectual convictions and his poetry than ever existed in any other individual; both appearing as the product of the same striving after truth, and blending even the feelings of the heart with the cold light of a spiritual philosophy. As his opinions were in conflict with those upon which the principal institutions of society were built, he roused a host of enemies, who left him little rest either day or night, but who were continually galling him with the shafts of poisoned malice. Hence, his life was a scene of perpetual anxiety and struggle. By constitution frail and delicate, he was about the last person fitted to endure the buffets which this throwing down the gauntlet against society brought on himself. But nothing could make Shelley swerve from his course. With

a sublime impersonation of Promethean will, he was prepared to encounter every form of persecution, in carrying what he believed to be the torch of truth down into the darkest recesses of the human mind, and annihilating, at their source, the mists of prejudice and superstition at once and for ever.

Astronomers say that if the axis of the earth could be brought upon a line with the equator, instead of being twenty-three-and-a-half degrees removed from it, we should have perpetual spring. Storms would cease, diseases be unknown, and man return to the golden age. Shelley thought that society had equally deflected from the right path, to the great misery of man, and that it might be brought back to the unerring line of justice, reason, and love. All his life was an effort in this direction. He sought, by applying the lever of spiritual conviction to the heart of man, to remove the world to its right place again. The evil which Christianity traced to the sin engrafted upon every offshoot of humanity by the conditions of its birth, was to Shelley an accident which might be expelled from creation, if man would only remain true to the harmonies of his nature. To elicit these harmonies; to show their accordance with the universe of which man was designed as the crowning feature, and not a mere blotch upon its surface; to demonstrate that evil was factitious and transient, and good alone natural and permanent, was the aim of Shelley's life, and the object of all his writings. If he erred, it was on the side of philanthropy. If he stumbled, it was through excess of love. The light which led him astray was pre-eminently light from heaven.

To understand Shelley's principles, and enter into the spirit of his poetry, the mind must be to some extent imbued with the Alexandrine philosophy. He did not believe in the existence of matter. The external universe to him was a phantasm. All the outward manifestations of sense were spiritual embodiments, either alone existing in the mind's ideal sense of such, or as the outward moulds of beings as incorporeal as itself. Space and time were the mere conditions of sensuous intuition.

and fell to pieces with the material phenomena to which they fixed the limits of a beginning and an end. We have only to rise above the empirical notions of sense to annihilate such vulgar conceptions as limits, and wander about like disembodied spirits with the whole of immensity for our dwelling-place. If all external forms are an illusion, so is death, which is the commencement of a new life, the entrance on another cycle of being, or the mere absorption of the outward embodiments in the folds of another more adapted to the spirit's growth. But presiding over all these plastic shapes of weird creation, ever collapsing and re-clothing themselves with new forms, there was a spirit of beauty directing everything to some fit end, and sustaining, between the relations of each, that law of harmonious development which ought to have its reflex in the moral world. The whole hierarchy of spiritual ministrants, whether endued with self-consciousness or not, employed in the perpétual regeneration of love and beauty in the world, and each working in proper sequence, under agents gradually culminating in the essence or fountain of good, Shelley blended, with all he realized of beauty and truth, in the springs of creation, and in the restorative elements of the universe. In like manner, evil had its wide-spread agencies, ever active for mischief, operating in powerful combination, which it was the duty of man, in unison with the law of love, to banish from creation. Shelley believed himself, what every man ought to be, an apostle for that purpose, and certainly executed his mission in an unflinching spirit. Nearly every line of his poetry, as well as every act of his life, seemed aimed at extinguishing evil among mankind.

The theory of the perfectibility of the human race led Shelley to make war upon all the elements of society opposed to its realization; and the animosity which the struggle provoked, threw him with ten-fold force back upon the resources of nature. Had Shelley been the lion of social circles, he still would have worshipped nature with impassioned enthusiasm; but when nearly every door was slammed in his face, when

society regarded him as an explosive individual,—a kind of Titanic Sampson, bent upon pulling its framework to pieces, in order that he might bury man beneath its ruins, the marvels of the universe bound his soul with tenfold Circean spells. His life seems to have been passed in wooing Nature under all her forms. In calm moon-light, in storm and tempest, at the uprising of the dawn, or during the fleeting draperies of twilight, Shelley, with the eagerness of a painter, watched every changing streak of colour, every purple gleam of light, every flickering attenuation of shadow, as if he were inhaling not breath from the atmosphere, but inspiration. Shelley, indeed, studied natural phenomena so intensely, as if he thought that some deeper glimpse into the mysteries of nature, some further solution of the problem of existence, and of the enigma of life and death, was to be obtained by this zealous scrutiny of her features. He appeared to regard the elemental powers with the eye of an ancient Greek, and drank in their sounds, as if they brought to his soul reliable information from another sphere. At all events, his philosophy assured him there was a kinship between the soul of man and the active forces of nature; and if we regard his frail tenement and the mighty soul which seemed to rend its shell as lightning tears a cloud, it would seem, to have required little imagination on his part, to have regarded himself but a short remove from an elemental god. All these characteristics, together with his sense of world abandonment, the poet has described in language unrivalled for force, beauty, and tenderness, in any literature:—

'Midst others of less note, came one frail form,
A phantom among men ; companionless
As the last cloud of an expiring storm,
Whose thunder is its knell ; he, as I guess,
Had gazed on Nature's naked loveliness
Actæon-like, and now he fled astray
With feeble steps o'er the world's wilderness,
And his own thoughts along that rugged way
Pursued, like raging hounds, their father and their prey.

A pard-like spirit, beautiful and swift,—
 A love in desolation masked ;—a power
 Girt round with weakness ; it can scarce uplift
 The weight of the superincumbent hour.
 It is a dying lamp, a falling shower,
 A breaking billow ; even while we speak,
 Is it not broken ? on the withering flower
 The killing sun smiles brightly : on a cheek
 The life can burn in blood, even while the heart may break.
 His head was bound with pansies over-blown,
 And faded violets, white, and pied, and blue,
 And a light spear topped with a cyprus cone,
 Round whose rude shaft dark ivy tresses grew,
 Yet dripping with the forest's noon-day dew,
 Vibrated, as the ever-beating heart
 Shook the weak hand that grasped it : Of that crew
 He came the last, neglected and apart,
 A herd-abandoned deer, struck by the hunter's dart.*

The passion of other poets for Nature has been more or less of a dilettante character. It has always given way under the strain of much physical inconvenience. Wordsworth never lingered among beautiful scenery, unless the solid comforts of an inn could be found in the immediate neighbourhood. Moore had an eye for the artistic combination of glen, mountain, and lake, but he must contemplate them from a gilded ottoman with a Brussels underneath his feet. With Shelley such things were simply ignored. His whole being was swallowed up in the thought of the divine loveliness before him. His ascetic diet, his absolute scorn of the pleasures of the table, gave him in this respect advantage over his contemporaries. He encountered all weathers, endured every kind of social inconvenience, in order to track the foot-prints of loveliness and grandeur, wherever they could be found. Alpine storms, and sea tempests ; the roar of the ocean upon romantic coasts, where rugged rocks in their wildness emulated the jagged clouds reflecting from their burnished faces the splendours of a Claudian sunset ;—these were his home, and he appeared to enjoy them the more,

* Adonais.

as they were shut out from the luxuries of conventional society. When Shelley saw a grand spot, where Nature revelled in majestic and Titanic wonders, it was a matter of very little moment to him that there was no decent habitation in the place. If there was a hut, he could live in that, and if there was not, he could make one. It was in this spirit he pedestrianised Switzerland, and settled upon some of the wildest parts of the Italian coast, after having familiarized his mind with the beauties of Killarney, the luxuriant valleys of Wales, the wood-encircling lakes of Cumberland, and the beech-covered lawns of Marlow and Windsor. Even when comfortably housed in any of these localities, Shelley did not, like his contemporaries, compose his verse in an easy chair upon a well-carpeted floor, with a curtained window in front of his desk, letting in upon him vistas of beautiful scenery, while excluding the drenching rain or the oppressive glare of the heat; neither did he compose his sea pictures, like Campbell, in a well-furnished room overlooking the waves, contenting himself with occasional glimpses of Neptune, through the double lens of his telescope. Shelley made his skiff, or the cavern, and when inland, the wood and the hedge copse, his study. Armed with pencil, and a book of blank paper, while a tempest was brewing in the black sky, or Nature lulled asleep in noontide sultriness, he would fling himself into the heart of her tumult or repose, and dot down his conceptions as they came into his mind. In this manner he composed his "Revolt of Islam," with the Thames rocking his boat under the beeches of Marlow, and the "Witch of Atlas" while out in a pedestrian excursion to San Pelegrino. The "Prometheus Unbound" was similarly written while gazing on the fragments of the Roman world, seated on the plinths of the baths of Caracalla; and the "Triumphs of Life," while gliding along the purple Mediterranean, or exploring by moonlight in his little shallop, the caves which fringe the rock-bound gulf of Spezia. Hence, Shelley's life was an eminently poetic life, as his philosophy was an eminently poetic philosophy. In the

ardour with which he flung himself into the embraces of his art, in the rapt enthusiasm with which he drank in every aspect of the beautiful and the grand until it became a part of his being, in the yearning devotion with which he idolized Nature, and drenched himself with inspiration at her source, Shelley surpasses every other poet of whom history has left record. Had he lived in more classical times, he might have been sculptured as a tenth muse, with a globe and a lyre symbolizing the mysterious harmonies between the soul and the universe.

The character of Shelley's poetry is just what might be expected from this interfusion of a poetic life with a poetic philosophy. Of man's ways in society we get little, but of man in relation to his higher destinies, and of those aspects of the universe which throw light upon his nature in the abstract, we get everything. Shelley does not appear, in his poetry, to interest himself much about human concerns in any phase of society, except so far as they served to illustrate his peculiar views of human perfectibility. To sit down, like Scott, to verify romantic stories for the amusement of his species, seemed to Shelley a degradation of his art. He felt the mantle of the seer and prophet upon him, endowing him with the power, through the instrumentality of the lyre, to awaken man from the depths of his degradation, to the beauty of that higher life which awaited him when escaped from the bonds of prejudice and custom. He obeyed no law, but the dictates of his reason and the pure impulses of his heart. Poetry was to Shelley the great lever by which men's minds were to be incited to the accomplishment of their moral regeneration. Hence, his principal pieces contain an actual foreshadowing of the change, a development of the reason upon which it was to be based, a presentiment of the forces by which it was to be brought about. He seems to have regarded his art, even more than the old Greek dramatist, as a species of revelation, unveiling man's relation with the infinite, and befitting him for the subjugation of evil in others, by the extinction of selfishness in himself. In

this respect, the only modern poet who approaches him is Wordsworth. But Wordsworth's convictions were singularly wanting in unity of purpose, mingling a little bit of Alexandrianism here, and a little bit of the Thirty-nine Articles there, dovetailing a strange regard for liberal institutions abroad, with a strong aversion to them at home, until the whole structure of his teaching resembled a piece of tessellated mosaic, rather curious to look at, but utterly unsafe to stand upon. But Shelley's principles were pre-eminently harmonious and self-coherent. He carried his philosophical system, with logical sequence, into man's social relations, until the universal spirit of love and liberty, pervading all organic laws, became also paramount in the political structures of society; and these views, interlacing nature and human institutions in one consentaneous framework, he enforced with a flood of poetry so unsurpassingly grand in its effulgence, so abstract and spiritual in its loveliness, that if it failed to enchant all hearts, the defect is to be ascribed to the obtuseness of the popular mind to the metaphysical distinctions in which his conceptions were enshrined, and not to the conceptions themselves, or to the shaping of that imaginative power in which he surpassed all his contemporaries. Shelley's unpopularity arose from the fact, not so much that he was obscure, but that the national mind was dull. The old Greek dramatist was a grand intellectual force in his time; but to the modern reader, the old Greek dramatist, with his views about fate and destiny, his elemental deities, and his abstract personifications is about as uninteresting and unintelligible a personage as he can cope with. He is the poet of the past. In the same manner, Shelley imaged a state of society and built his views upon a system of human perfectibility, which can only be contemplated by an inversion of everything which absorbs the interest of the present. He is the poet of the future. It would, therefore, be manifestly unfair to judge of either in reference to the tastes of an age incapable of fathoming the recesses of their thoughts; or to test the quality of their genius by any other

standard than the fitness of that genius to represent the peculiar views of which they were the exponents.

The "Revolt of Islam," the only narrative poem Shelley wrote of any length, is invested with an apocalyptic character. An abscess had formed on Shelley's lungs. His physician only gave him a few months to live. He resolved to employ that time on some great work which would convey to posterity his own views of how their redemption was to be effected, and in what manner the first apostles of the new scheme of ideal regeneration were to meet their fate. But like all apocalyptic writings, these views are conveyed to us through a series of dreams, or rapt visions, which set the comprehension of ordinary readers, as well as the rules of art, at defiance. He imagines two lovers in Turkish Greece impelling, by the ardour of their genius, the population to cast off the yoke of their tyrants, and inaugurate for their species a new reign of love and benevolence. They momentarily succeed in the attempt, but not before the hero has been left for dead, and the heroine driven to frenzy by the embraces of a master whom she loathed. Their final victory, however, is only achieved to be overthrown by a combination of foreign despots. The lovers, after a few days of ecstatic intercourse, give themselves up to the conquerors, and are burnt alive. Their death, however, is phenomenal only. Shelley introduces them to us in the supernal world, of which this is but a shadow, enjoying the rapturous feast of bliss, a foretaste of which they had struggled to secure for humanity. There is, consequently, a greater unity about the piece than at first sight might appear. It may be regarded as a sort of apocalypse to the Alexandrine philosophy. It opens and it terminates in the ante-natal and posthumous world. The actions of Laon and Cythna are revealed to us in a series of visions, representing the force of intellectual conviction and moral truth over the minds of men. The outside world is phantasmal only, and is dealt with as such. Human action is represented of such stuff as dreams are made

of. The only abiding realities are spiritual truths, and that fervent mingling of soul with soul which is expressed by the word love. Hence, Shelley's conviction that, against these two breastplates, the tyrants' sword and the bigot's hate were destined early to prove powerless for ever.

Tried by the ordinary rules of art, perhaps, no poem, in any language, contains so many beauties, mingled with so many preposterous blemishes, as the "Revolt of Islam." The incidents are few, and those of a character to shock all notions of reality. Shelley seems to have had an idea that mankind were to be instigated, by a simple discourse, to rise in a body against the whole established structure of society, and overthrow in an hour the building which had taken decades of centuries to construct. A few words from the lips of a vagrant girl were sufficient to make a whole generation rise up against their old habits and prejudices, to break asunder the iron links of prescription and usage, out of some fancied dream of realizing, in a moment, the dream of general communism of property and universal brotherhood of love. The French revolution seems to have put into his head fancies of this nature. But the French revolution had its origin in grinding taxation, the oppression of the nobles, the exactions of the court, as well as in the writings of two or three generations of bold spirits, each waxing warmer in tone and more unbridled in expression, until the focus was reached of that fire which lifted society from the foundation upon which it had rested for centuries. But the complex action of these causes was far different from the wild ravings of a woman, to whose simple words the poet attributes efforts for transcending anything ascribed to the apostles of Rome, or the sibyls of Greece. It is no less marvellous when whole troops of ferocious men are proceeding to glut their revenge in the blood of their tyrants, that they should be turned aside from the act, by having their minds directed to its inutility; or to find infuriated slaves, armed to the teeth, changed into docile lambs, by being allowed to escape punish-

ment for their crimes. It is unfortunate that Shelley should have reduced into action his Quixotic ideas as to the effect of charity and magnanimity of spirit upon depraved multitudes to so great an extent as to have built up a great poem upon the notion, that the Spanish knight's method of freeing criminals from their chains, and turning them loose on society, was the best way to regenerate his species.

If Laon's "Experiences" are too visionary for belief, those of Cythna, the heroine of the story, surpass all the marvels of Arabian fiction. How, in a frenzy, she is transported from the Harem, by a diver who conducts her to a cave beneath the rocks of the sea, where she is fed by an eagle; and how she is lifted up again by an earthquake, upon a rock in the centre of the bleak ocean,—all this extravagance, I conjecture, must be taken to be nothing but the wild incoherency of her thoughts; but it is interwoven with the main action of the poem, wherein it only ought to have been mortised as an episode. The child, which is the fruit of the Harem adventure, and which cuts a conspicuous figure in the sea-cave, connects the tyrant of the golden city with Cythna, and forms a further link in the unity of the piece, by committing suicide at the funeral pile of the two lovers, in order to join them in the next world. Poets have a licence to play tricks with nature, whenever they deal in enchantments, or call into action the weird powers. But this interweaving of dreams with imaginative pictures, this piling of vision upon vision, without any solid substratum to support the cloudy fabric, utterly destroys verisimilitude, and with it everything like human interest in the characters of the poem. Could we take the story out of its unreal framework and interweave the actors with a plot of flesh and blood creation, this poem would outshine any other of similar extent in the language. But as it stands, its beauties gleam upon us, across its airy cloud-rack, like the fitful sun-light on an April day. The hopes of freedom's dawn thus shoot their vivid streaks across the night of slavery, which

is represented as winter wearing upon its slumbering face a dream of spring :—

‘ Such are the thoughts which, like the fires that glare
 In storm-encompassed isles, we cherish yet
 In this dark ruin. Such were mine even there ;
 As in its sleep some odorous violet,
 While yet its leaves with nightly dews are wet,
 Breathes in prophetic dreams of day’s uprise,
 Or as ere Scythian frost in fear has met
 Spring’s messengers descending from the skies,
 The buds foreknow their life—this hope must ever rise.’ *

The picture of Cythna who wanders with Laon,

Where earth and ocean meet
 Beyond the aerial mountains, whose vast cells
 The unrepousing billows ever beat,
 Through forests wide and old, and lawny dells
 Where boughs of incense droop over the emerald wells, †

will hold its own against any other in the language :—

‘ She moved upon this earth a shape of brightness,
 A power, that from its objects scarcely drew
 One impulse of her being—in her lightness
 Most like some radiant cloud of morning dew,
 Which wanders through the waste air’s pathless blue,
 To nourish some far desert ; she did seem
 Beside me, gathering beauty as she grew,
 Like the bright shade of some immortal dream
 Which walks, when tempest sleeps, the wave of life’s dark stream.’ ‡

The passion of Laon and Cythna has a radiance flung around it of fiery depth and splendour which reveal all the glowing ardour of the poet’s nature :—

‘ The meteor showed the leaves on which we sate ;
 And Cythna’s glowing arms, and the thick ties
 Of her soft hair, which bent with gathered weight
 My neck near hers ; her dark and deepening eyes

* C. vii., st. 37.

† C. vi., st. 25.

‡ C. ii., st. 23.

Which (as twin phantoms of one star that lies
 O'er a dim well, move, though the star reposes,)
 Swam in our mute and liquid ecstasies ;
 Her marble brow, and eager lips, like roses,
 With their own fragrance pale, which Spring but half uncloses.'

'The meteor to its far morass returned :
 The beating of our veins one interval
 Made still ; and then I felt the blood that burned
 Within her frame, mingle with mine, and fall
 Around my heart like fire ; and over all
 A mist was spread, the sickness of a deep
 And speechless swoon of joy, as might befall
 Two disunited spirits when they leap
 In union from this earth's obscure and fading sleep.'*

* * * * *

'Her lips were parted, and the measured breath
 Was now heard there ;—her dark and intricate eyes
 Orb within orb, deeper than sleep or death,
 Absorbed the glories of the burning skies,
 Which, mingling with her heart's deep ecstasies,
 Burst from her looks and gestures ;—and a light
 Of liquid tenderness, like love, did rise
 From her whole frame,—an atmosphere which quite
 Arrayed her in its beams, tremulous, and soft, and bright.'

'She would have clasped me to her glowing frame ;
 Those warm and odorous lips might soon have shed
 On mine the fragrance and the invisible flame
 Which now the cold winds stole ;—she would have laid
 Upon my languid heart her dearest head ;
 I might have heard her voice, tender and sweet :
 Her eyes mingling with mine, might soon have fed
 My soul with their own joy.—One moment yet
 I gazed—we parted then, never again to meet.'†

Beauties of this sort abound in the poem, and when we consider the ethereal light in which even its tamest parts are steeped, and the fire and vigour with which the whole is executed, the

* C. vi., sts. 34, 35.

† C. xi., sts. 5, 6.

regret is doubly felt that conceptions, which, if united with a better ground-plan, would have been as familiar to us as household words, should, as they stand gilding an unnatural fabric, promise to be the least popular of any in our literature.

The "Revolt of Islam" represented a defeat, which Shelley believed would be but temporary; for it was no part of his creed that vice and misery would always be in the ascendant in this world, that the great bulk of mankind would be for ever excluded from their inheritance, but that in the end, humanity would rise triumphant over most of the evils by which it is, at present, assailed. Wars would cease, diseases be exterminated, superstition banished, kingcraft abolished, crime annihilated, and man rejoice in the plenitude of moral truth, of paternal concord, and intellectual freedom. This change in the human world would be attended by a sort of palæogenesis, with a corresponding change in the animal and terrestrial world. Every thing would cast off its evil nature as an outworn garment, and bask in the universal reign of love. Shelley seems to have been prepossessed with the idea that man only need to resume his own perfectibility, to ensure the universal triumph of good in the outward universe. The wild and predatory animals would either disappear, or transmute their fierce into gentle natures. Poisonous plants would become healthy, and noxious elements sound. The atmosphere would refuse to suck in pestilence, and no blasts would strike sterility into the womb of the earth. As before the pre-historic period, races existed in harmony with the totally different state of climate, and vegetation then existing; so if man were to undergo a change in his moral faculties, a corresponding change might be expected to follow in his physical condition, and both would necessitate a revolution in the spiritual and physical elements of the universe. As long as man, the highest product of creation, is rotten, the whole structure must be proportionally infirm; but make him sound, and the surrounding elements will partake of the perfection embodied in their loftiest manifesta-

tion. At least such is the scheme which the "Prometheus Unbound" presents to us; and though the conception of the drama is derived from Æschylus, yet so different is Shelley's manner of treatment, to such an extent has he enlarged the boundaries of his subject, that it comes before us with the freshness of an original performance. According to the old story, Prometheus, for endowing the outcast race of men with the possession of the arts, was chained to a rock, and condemned by Jupiter to have his entrails gnawed by vultures, though he had assisted that potentate to usurp the throne of Olympus, from which Jove and Kronos had formerly expelled Saturn. It was evidently the design of Æschylus, when Hercules, in the further expansion of the drama, by the order of the Fates, unboudn Prometheus, to reconcile the justice of Jupiter with the punishment he had ungratefully inflicted upon an ally: for the father of God and men, whose usurpation was always represented by the poets as the establishment of order and anarchy, could not be supposed to have been represented, at their religious rites, as a ferocious tyrant. But Shelley seized upon the story as typical of the evils which humanity was undergoing from the rule of the present supposed god of the universe, who had usurped the place of Saturn, that is, of the spirit of universal love actuating the form of intellectual beauty. The usurper, drunk with excess of power, marries Thetis, and she gives birth to a hero who frees the human race, personified in Prometheus, from the numerous hosts of evils preying on his vitals, and restores the golden reign of Saturn with all the paradisaal bliss from which man had been so ruthlessly excluded. Such are the outlines of the picture which Shelley has filled up with the most gorgeous poetry. Though the ordinary reader may fail to realize his acute metaphysical distinctions, or to bring the elemental power which he has endued with living forms within the regions of flesh and blood, still it cannot be denied, with all their cloudland dreaminess and shadow, they are more real in their way than the allegorical

personifications of Spenser, and subserve a more practical purpose as the exponents of a deep philosophy. They are the outward embodiments of vital forces which are intimately blended with the destinies of man. As such, the truthfulness of the conceptions must be tested by a reference to the ideas they are intended to convey, and the functions of those ideas in bringing about the changes they are designed to illustrate. In this respect, there can hardly be a doubt that Shelley ascended to the height of his subject. His embodiments are instinct with life. Their beauty is only such as could be caught by the rapt vision of a poet's eye. The marvellous groupings of his figures would suck the soul out of a sculptor. While their deep tenderness remind us of the faces of Raphael's madonnas, their voluptuous forms are hardly surpassed by the outlines of Titian himself. Nature dawns upon us in a series of spiritual visions, combining regions of fairy loveliness with the broad outlines of a philosophy, which aims at realizing all the magical colouring of the poet's visions, in the sphere of truth. That Shelley in his "Prometheus," as well as in his "Hellas," with reference to the poetry of his subject, and its ground-plan in the region of abstract thought, surpasses Æschylus, few, I think, would be disposed to deny; but Æschylus wrote for an audience who felt their own fortunes, and the folds of their social and religious life, indissolubly blent with the poet's conceptions, and who, on that account, could grasp them as substantial existences; but Shelley, for an audience, who regarded his conceptions as the airy phantoms of a dream, never likely to be realized. Hence, while the triumphs of the one are stereotyped in history, those of the other only exist in the mind of the metaphysician.

Had Shelley never descended into the regions of actual fact, it might have remained doubtful whether he could have constructed a story appealing powerfully to human interests with any success. But in the "Cenci" he has tested his strength in the highest walk of modern dramatic art, with a result unequalled since the days of Marlowe and Shakespeare. The

interest is powerfully sustained to the end. The action never flags. The characters are as boldly conceived as they are accurately executed. The daring and fiend-like determination of Francesco, the timid and vacillating purposes of the brother, the ruffianism of Orsino, are all so many foils to set off Beatrice, the grand impersonation of sublime despair, whose purity sheds a halo of heroism round the fearful act she nerves others to perform as the only plank of escape from moral pollution. Now these characters are drawn in the most natural manner in the world. They do not rant or mouth fine sentiments unconnected with natural outburst of passion, or with the development of the plot, simply to show the author's poetic powers. Their words, as well as their acts, are simply such as would be expected from people of similar disposition, surrounded by similar circumstances. There is not a line of waste writing in the piece. The writer has made the characters unfold themselves, not from their language, but from their acts, while these are none other than are required for the natural development of the story in crystalline clearness and completeness. In the hands of Shakespeare, the plot would have assumed a wider basis. The facetious element would have been introduced, in which Shelley was woefully deficient. There would have been more grandeur in some parts, and more turgidity in others. But I hardly think the story would have been better told, or the characters more truthfully drawn. It is a marvel that Shelley, who never appears to have bestowed any study upon the Elizabethan dramatists, should in this, his first attempt, have equalled all but the foremost of them in that species of composition which he had designedly neglected, but upon which they had concentrated all their genius.

That Shelley evinced no lack of power in dealing with objects of human interest when he allowed such to enthrall his nature, is evinced by many of his smaller pieces, most of which are gems of surpassing beauty, whose lustre is rather likely to be enhanced than to suffer by comparison with any

other kindred productions in the language. For while, in these pieces, the actual is never lost sight of, it is robed with such ideal imagery as makes the material float in the splendours of spiritual creation. A rich light permeates every object, until the substantial form seems but the shadow of an ethereal element. The death of poor Keats, at once struck all the chords of his heart. The result was a monody which, for depth of feeling, for exquisite pathos, for the beautiful embodiments of the powers of nature, draped in the hues of a subtle philosophy, is unsurpassed in any literature. The "Adonais" may challenge comparison with "Lycidas," even in plaintive melody, or naïve grace and tender simplicity. In every other quality Milton would be the first to admit his rival's superiority. The "Ode to the Skylark," and the lines on "Dejection in the Bay of Naples," evince his power in clothing mere sensations with grand imagery, whether excited by visions of joy, or tossed upon the rack of despair. His love ditties are the incarnation of passionate tenderness suffused with deep melancholy, so that we are perplexed to know which feeling is uppermost, or how so much joy and sadness can be intermingled without destroying each other. In the "Alastor," and the "Epipsychidion," the yearning of the soul after ideal beauty, both in feminine as well as in material creation, is imaged forth, with depth of fervour and a gorgeousness of colouring which presents a true image of the poet's life. Assuredly, if Shelley was wanting so often in making the inconstant play of the passions the burthen of his song, it was not for lack of capacity, but from his conviction that the muse ought to aim at the nobler flight of filching from heaven that light which was to unriddle the mysteries of creation.

It can hardly, however, be maintained that Shelley was equal to the production of a grand representative poem, like "Don Juan," for instance, as he wanted the humorous element, without which any adequate representation of the conflicting interests of human life is clearly impossible. He also wanted that intimate experience with the world and its affairs, which

alone can enable men to stereotype its pictures in the vivid imagery of expression. Even this is apparent in his delineation of love, in which the human, is always submerged in the ideal, tints of the passion. Shelley was the child of spirituality. The real world with its conventual forms, and its apparent absence of deep emotional sympathies, was entirely foreign to his nature. He did not take the pains to master it; it is, therefore, very much doubted whether he possessed the power. In this respect, he appears in disadvantageous contrast to Lord Byron, who entered into the spirit of social phenomena, and showed the depths of feeling in all their shivering nakedness, which it was the object of conventional forms to conceal. Shelley, doubtless, did not think the follies of society worth unmasking, while there was higher game to fly at. But Byron riots in the process, until the laying bare the manifold hypocrisies of custom, became the god of his intellectual life.

Byron and Shelley were, in most respects, the antithesis of each other; and had they not felt themselves linked together in one common fate, as the victims of the prejudices of their countrymen, as well as by congenial pursuits, the marvel would have been that characters so opposite could have cherished lasting sympathy for each other. Shelley always manifested a universal spirit of love for his kind; Byron a universal spirit of hatred. The nature of Shelley was all sweetness; that of Byron all bitterness. The one had a logical series of convictions, self-coherent and harmonious, which he enforced at all times upon everybody with whom he came into contact; the other had no belief whatever, but doubted of everything except the existence of evil. Shelley had little satire or facetiousness in his disposition; Byron was, by turns, caustic and humorous. Shelley steeped the material world in the colours of the ideal; Byron, the ideal world in the colours of the material. Shelley believed that everything was pure at its birth, and had gone wrong by accident, but only, in the order of time, to be restored to its original goodness; Byron

believed that everything was radically wrong, by evil engendered in its nature, and would so continue to the end of the chapter. Byron exercised his art to amuse or astonish, Shelley to instruct and purify, his species. There can be no doubt in nearly all these points of contrast, the advantage is with Shelley. In poetic power, I do not know, except in the two classes of satire, and the representative poem, that he is inferior to his great contemporary. In the lyrical, as well as historical drama, Byron could not even approach him. If Byron had the advantage in the reproduction of actual passion, Shelley triumphs in self-sustained ideal power. Byron accomplished more, because he lived the longer. But it appears to me that Shelley evinced the grander poetic capacity. It is, also, only fair to consider that Shelley helped Byron to much of his ideal splendour, while his noble friend could not return the gift by inoculating Shelley with his world-wide experience.

Notwithstanding Byron's hostility to most of the institutions of his country, in his delineations of human passion, and his pictures of human life, he appealed to a large public who responded to his efforts by grand ovations of applause. But Shelley was unsustained by any sympathizing audience: even the most ethereal of his productions fell like dead fruit, unheeded to the ground. It was not that he enshrined his thoughts in the garb of a metaphysical philosophy; but he appeared to take a pleasure in representing his opinions to be as divergent from the popular creed as possible, as if it were a point with him to encounter the most virulent opposition,—to reap the widest harvest of disgust. His belief in a spirit of beauty and design, impregnating every part of the universe, and pre-determining everything for good, might have saved him from the stigma of atheism which he so resolutely brought upon himself. His view of the perfectibility of man being connected with the perfectibility of the universe, is, after all, but the direct counterpart of the doctrine of the Fall, which represents nature as rising in rebellion against man, as soon as man rose

in rebellion against himself. The ardour with which Shelley looked forward to the extinction of evil, was only another exemplification of that yearning for the millennium which many enthusiastic divines believe will be brought about by other means. Shelley's views of the moral law, differed little, if anything, from the doctrines of the New Testament. Indeed, it would not be difficult to show that most of the views propounded by Shelley, had some analogy or kinship with those entertained by the orthodox of his day ; the only difference being that both believed in the same agency under varying forms, and sought the final results by the employment of different factors. But Shelley had imbibed with his Alexandrian notions, enough, if not all, of that hostility to Christianity, manifested by the cultivators of the old philosophy to the nascent creed, which first pursued that philosophy to temporary destruction, and then applied its dead forms to leaven much of its new spirit. But Shelley was not the man to learn anything from so ghastly a source as history. He therefore encountered Christianity with the same virulence, as if this amalgamation had not taken place,—as if Proclus was still writing the *Enneades*, and Celsus was still thundering his indignation against Gregory Nazienzen. By this means he not only aroused useless antagonism, but prevented himself from sympathizing with much that was beautiful in the past, and many sources of spiritual loveliness which animated the present. The area of his æsthetic views was narrowed in proportion. Though most lavish in his charities, he appears to have had but a faint conception of the virtues arising from that proper discipline of the passions, which Christianity had impressed upon the world. If the popular belief inculcated a sage restraint in the cultivation of chastity, I fear that would have been reason enough with Shelley for counselling indulgence.

Shelley's views with regard to the relations which ought to exist between the two sexes, were doubtless imbibed, like most of his other notions respecting society, from Plato's *Republic*.

Those relations he would have established upon the widest freedom consistent with man's moral development. No union, in his view, was legitimate unless based upon the mutual affection of both parties. When the bond of sympathy was broken, no matter whether on the part of both, or either, the union was dissolved in reality, and ought not to be allowed to drag on, after its soul was dead, a wretched legal existence. All forms of prostitution, all commingling of the sexes, which had mere convenience or lechery for its basis, Shelley regarded with the utmost aversion; but when love had struck root in the tender feelings of the heart,—when it had taken up its home in the recesses of the soul, and generated from thence mutual fires, he was so prepossessed with the notion, of its right to proceed to any length it pleased, in defiance of present responsibilities or former engagements, that with his usual disingenuousness, he not only did not scruple to reduce the theory to practice, but introduced it into his domestic establishment. To some such source is to be ascribed those mistakes in his matrimonial connections, which threw such a blight over his subsequent career. His first wife was, doubtless, not so well suited to sympathize with his pursuits as Miss Godwin. Yet it was on this slender ground that Shelley thought himself justified in leaving her in an advanced stage of pregnancy, after she had borne him one child, in order to cohabit with another woman. Had there been a wide-growing estrangement, threatening a breach between the parties, this ungracious step would not have been without some excuse. But dates and documentary evidence are against this supposition. Shelley, after marrying Harriett Westbrook, in Holland, in 1811, went through a second marriage with that lady, in March, 1814, to legitimate the offspring in the eye of English law. Hardly four months after that act, he left England with Miss Godwin, whose acquaintance he had formed in the interim. From such facts, there can be only one inference, that Shelley thought every man entitled to abandon the partner whom he had apparently

selected for life, upon meeting with another more congenial to his tastes ; having, of course, made his first wife a suitable provision for her maintenance. The subsequent suicide which followed, after the return of the newly-engaged parties to England, when the connection began to assume the firmness of adamant, we are assured, was brought about by causes in which Shelley had no concern whatever. But who can dive into the recesses of a mind distracted with its own sorrows, and pretend to separate the entangled skein of motives so clearly as to enable him to say, these and these only led to the perpetration of the dire result?

A direct cause, or the *causa causans* of the calamity, the Godwin connection may not have been, but that it was the indirect cause, that is, one of the agents leading up to it, and without which the mischief could not possibly have happened, no one will be surely bold enough to deny. Such, indeed, appears to have been Shelley's view, as the rash act cast a profound gloom over his closing years, and filled his love strains with that sadness which reminds us of Ophelia's love dirge, as she was sinking with her rose-wreath into the embrace of death. The "Invocation to Misery," the beautiful "Ode to the Future," and some lines of heart-breaking tenderness over a life separation, which Shelley's editors have had the bad taste to inscribe to Harriet Grove, a casual sweetheart of his boyhood, were all written under a keen sense of the misfortune which his levity, or the practical embodiment of his theories, had brought upon him. Could Shelley have foreseen the consequence, he was too feeling a man not even to have sacrificed his own happiness, than entail wretchedness upon those whom he had sworn to shelter from its pangs. But with his peculiar convictions, he, doubtless, blamed society rather than himself, for the result, by fostering in woman, through its Draconian marriage laws, that chastity of principle, which regards fixity of tenure in wedlock, as the only foundation of her future happiness. Shelley may have, doubtless, reasoned himself into the conviction that he was doing his

wife, no less than society, a service, by overturning a principle in his own person, which both mistook for the corner-stone of their security, but which was to him the perennial source of misery and pollution. He did not, therefore, go the wrong way with the torch pointing out the right way. He erred, as the best of us will assuredly err, when the promptings of the heart assume the guise of intellectual convictions. Unmitigated selfishness would never have led Shelley astray, had it not come to him in the form of an angel of light; and the reader may stand over his grave—as the writer has done, when the violets of the early Roman spring were steeping his dust in living fragrance—with the feeling that humanity has rarely enshrined a purer or loftier spirit.

Keats.

WITHIN view of Shelley's grave, rests the dust of Keats. It seems fitting that men so akin to each other in spirit, should rest side by side. For they were united in the same belief in human perfectibility, in the same antagonism to the public institutions of their time. They drew their inspiration from the same fountain—the undying beauty of the world's youth, as imaged in the creations of antique Greece. The souls of each seemed kindled with flame lit direct from the altar of the gods. Both re-embodied the old divinities. Steeped in the light of their genius, the denizens of Olympus no longer appeared abstract personifications of some particular quality, but actual flesh-and-blood creations, with sympathies as keen, with affections as glowing as our own. The aim of both was to invest earth with the spiritual light of Elysium, to companion man with the divinities, to restore the links of that philosophy which, viewing every atom as a manifestation of spirit, in a higher or lower form, bound up the universe in one reciprocal bond of mutual relationship and dependance. To them the old conception of the elemental powers seemed the best expression of the invisible agencies presiding over the destinies of creation. The times for which Julian had sighed, almost appeared to have come back again. The deities of Greece stepped from their pedestals once more to converse with mortals. Heaven appeared a part of earth, as earth appeared the fore-court of heaven.

With Wordsworth, poetry was a philosophy. But with

Shelley and Keats it was both a philosophy and a religion. But Shelley seems to have arrived at his results by processes of reasoning, Keats by flights of his imagination. With Shelley, truth always appeared as the spirit of beauty. But Keats saw in beauty the spirit of truth. He had no idea of truth apart from the imaginative element, as something locked up under the control of the logical faculty. The spirit of beauty manifesting itself in the outer harmonies of things, appeared to him only a reflex of the operations of the same spirit in the invisible sphere; and he thought its results could be far more easily fathomed by the imagination, than by any ratiocinative process whatever. Indeed, I very much doubt whether Keats did not think forms of reasoning, with respect to their competency to conduct men into the interior labyrinths of the universe, as forms of delusion. The old Greek, therefore, who lent wings to his fancy, when he wanted to account for natural phenomena, appeared to Keats a far more sensible personage than the modern philosopher, who applies the scale and compass to unveil the mysteries of creation. For the one only accounts for the transient and merely apparent action of delusive atoms of matter upon each other, whereas the other seizes hold of principles as permanent as they are real, and embodies them in effulgent forms, to supply and preserve in us the qualities of which they are the living exponents. If these forms did not exist except as symbols of the qualities which animated them, that appeared to Keats a very small matter, so long as their actions shadowed forth the operation of the qualities of which they were the embodiment, in the scheme of the universe. To that extent, at least, to Keats they were true. Now, of these qualities, love appeared the animating principle, as beauty was the external form; and the object of Keats' chief poem appears to have been to seek out further instances of these symbolised truths, revealing still deeper glimpses into this intimate alliance between love and beauty, in the actual relations of things, and thus light up the material with the splendours of the ideal universe :—

Ye deaf and senseless minutes of the day,
 And thou, old forest, hold ye this for true,
 There is no lightning, no authentic dew
 But in the eye of love : there's not a sound,
 Melodious howsoever, can confound
 The heavens and earth in one to such a death
 As doth the voice of love : there's not a breath
 Will mingle kindly with the meadow air,
 Till it has panted round, and stolen a share
 Of passion from the heart.*

That there was a link between the sympathy of the elements for each other, and that existing between human beings, Keats not only believed, but hints that the one could not go on without the other :—

Who, of men, can tell
 That flowers would bloom, or that green fruit would swell
 To melting pulp ; that fish would have bright mail,
 The earth its dower of river, wood, and vale,
 The meadows runnels, runnels pebble-stones,
 The seed its harvest, or the lute its tones,
 Tones ravishment, or ravishment its sweet,
 If human souls did never kiss and greet ? †

It is when diving deep into those secret relations between the different ranks of creation, free from the conditions under which the laws of intuition are exercised, that we get beyond the cheating appearances of things, and live like disembodied spirits in the very heart of the universe :—

Wherein lies happiness ? In that which beck
 Our ready minds, to fellowship divine,
 A fellowship with essence, till we shine,
 Full alchemised and free of space. Behold
 The clear religion of heaven ! Fold
 A rose-leaf round thy finger's taperness,
 And soothe thy lips : hist ! when the airy stress
 Of Music's kiss impregnates the free winds,

* "Endymion," b. iv., ls. 153—163.

† *Ibid*, b. i.

And with a sympathetic touch unbinds
Eolian magic from their lucid wombs ;
Then old songs waken from enclouded tombs,
Old ditties sigh above their father's grave ;
Ghosts of melodious prophesyings rave
Round every spot where trod Apollo's foot ;
Bronze clarions awake, and faintly bruit,
Where long ago a giant-battle was ;
And from the turf, a lullaby doth pass
In every place where infant Orpheus slept.
Feel we these things ? that moment have we stept
Into a sort of oneness, and our state
Is like a floating spirit.*

As love with Keats is the great bond which binds together the different orders of creation, so in the little world of man, it is the only feature which claims eternal remembrance, no less in the history of the human race than in the experience of each private individual. Battles, sieges, and political or religious revolutions, are mere lumber in the chamber of history, being completely overshadowed by feats of love, which can alone rivet our attention, while deeds of rapine and social convulsion fast sink into oblivion :—

O sovereign power of love ! O grief ! O balm !
All records, saving thine, come cool, and calm,
And shadowy, through the mist of passed years :
For others, good or bad, hatred and tears
Have become indolent ; but touching thine,
One sigh doth echo, one poor sob doth pine,
One kiss brings honey-dew from buried days.
The woes of Troy, towers smouldering o'er their blaze,
Stiff-holden shields, far-piercing spears, keen blades,
Struggling, and blood, and shrieks—all dimly fades
Into some backward corner of the brain ;
Yet, in our very souls, we feel amain
The close of Troilus and Cressid sweet.
Hence, pageant history ! hence, gilded cheat !
Swart planet in the universe of deeds !
Wide sea, that one continuous murmur breeds

* "Endymion," b. i.

Along the pebbled shore of memory !
 Many old rotten-timber'd boats there be
 Upon thy vaporous bosom, magnified
 To goodly vessels ; many a sail of pride,
 And golden keel'd, is left unlaunch'd and dry.
 But wherefore this ? What care, though owl did fly
 About the great Athenian admiral's mast ?
 What care, though striding Alexander past
 The Indus with his Macedonian numbers ?
 Though old Ulysses tortured from his slumbers
 The gluttoned Cyclops, what care ?——Juliet leaning
 Amid her window-flowers,—sighing,—weaning
 Tenderly her fancy from its maiden snow,
 Doth more avail than these : the silver flow
 Of Hero's tears, the swoon of Imogen,
 Fair Pastorella in the bandit's den,
 Are things to brood on with more ardency
 Than the death-day of empires. Fearfully
 Must such conviction come upon his head,
 Who, thus far, discontent, has dared to tread,
 Without one muse's smile, or kind behest,
 The path of love and poesy. But rest,
 In chaffing restlessness, is yet more drear
 Than to be crush'd, in striving to uprear
 Love's standard on the battlements of song.
 So once more days and nights aid me along,
 Like legion'd soldiers.*

The plot of "Endymion," if, indeed, there is any sequence of events in the poem worthy of that name, brings the Latmian shepherd in contact with the loves of Venus and Adonis, of Alpheus and Arethusa, of Glaucus and Scylla, while the hero himself is pursuing his adventures with Diana. These, for the most part, are given in a series of visions. But the waking experiences of Endymion are so wild and romantic, and are so interwoven with his visionary ones, that it is difficult to say where the one ends, or the other begins. He descends into the sparry hollows of the earth, where cupids have the care of sleeping Adonis, whom Venus comes to rouse from his winter sleep, and

* "Endymion," b. ii.

transport into the skies, for summer dalliance. After riding between the wings of an eagle to a jasmine bower, for another dreaming dalliance with Diana, Endymion is transported to the palace of Olympus, upon a fiery courser, where he makes the acquaintance of the numerous household of Jupiter. On this journey he is accompanied by Diana, who leads him into the belief that she is an Indian waif from the train of Bacchus, and having in that capacity ensnared his affections, she, by some magical slight, appears to him in a vision to tax him with unfaithfulness, while he is couched in the Olympian hall, with the Indian waif whose form she had previously assumed. Endymion, perplexed between the Indian lady and the vision, is relieved from his conflicting loves by Diana dissolving into thin air. But this adventure, with respect to the marvellous, is surpassed by Endymion's visit to the roots of the ocean, where he assists Glaucus in reviving the dead bodies whom the waves had entombed, and transforming them into sea ministrants for the service of Neptune. As far as wonders go, Endymion's adventures exceed those of Astolfo, but the whole is shrined in so sensuous a philosophy, and is so deeply infused with the passion which more than any other engrosses human thought, that the sense of the marvellous is lost in the feeling that the visions of the poet do not transcend in their wildness, the spiritual harmonies of which they are the outward manifestation.

The "Endymion" contains passages which would do honour to the Elizabethan poets, with much commonplace which would disgrace Blackmore. The address to the moon, in the third book,* is conceived in the loftiest, the address to the muse, in the

* O Moon ! the oldest shades 'mong oldest trees
 Feel palpitations when thou lookest in :
 O Moon ! old boughs lisp forth a holier din
 The while they feel thine airy fellowship.
 Thou dost bless everywhere, with silver lip
 Kissing dead things to life. The sleeping kine,
 Couch'd in thy brightness, dream of fields divine :

fourth book, in the worst spirit of poetry. Wherever Keats has a picture of voluptuous passion, or of gorgeous scenery to paint, there he marvellously succeeds; wherever he has to produce any conception, which requires high moral truth to animate into life, there he egregiously fails. It would appear that his theory which submerged intellectual into æsthetic truth, exercised some deadening influence in unfitting him for that sweep through the blue empyrean of thought, by which alone the topmost heights of song can be scaled. For, instead of allowing his imagination to be moulded and guided by his judgment, his judgment takes its bent from the imagination. Fancy is never brought to illustrate reason, but reason is unceasingly employed upon the operations of fancy. Hence Keats, while perfect master of every subject which could be represented through the types of sensuous beauty, while he could condense a picture into a word, or make a line unfold a world of voluptuous thought, cannot advance a step in those regions where the ideal is to be sculptured out of the intellect alone, and where the imagination cannot invest its forms with the shapes and colours of actual creation. Of invention, in the wider sense, Keats affords us few if any striking samples. The time had not yet come when he could abandon his models and strike out new characters for himself. Boccaccio supplied him with the story

Innumerable mountains rise, and rise,
 Ambitious for the hallowing of thine eyes;
 And yet thy benediction passeth not
 One obscure hiding-place, one little spot
 Where pleasure may be sent: the nested wren
 Has thy fair face within its tranquil ken,
 And from beneath a sheltering ivy leaf
 Takes glimpses of thee; thou art a relief
 To the poor patient oyster, where it sleeps
 Within its pearly house;—the mighty deeps,
 The monstrous sea is thine—the myriad sea!
 O Moon! far-spooning ocean bows to thee,
 And Tellus feels her forehead's cumbrous load.

of "Isabella;" and Tooke's "Pantheon" with the groundwork of "Endymion." In the poem of "Lamia" he did little more than amplify Burton. His friend Brown supplied him with the plot and characters of the "Tragedy of King Otho." But of invention in the narrower sense, as regards the creation of incidents to fill up the lacunes of a story or of a character, he evinced no lack of power. In pathos also he was deficient. Meek-eyed pity, mother of tears, never extended her wand over Keats. His habit of reposing on delicious sensations, of making his home in the very heart of voluptuous beauty, led him to avoid cultivating the power of imparting a sense of foreign wretchedness to others. The lofty misery, the silken grief of unsated love yearning for an object it could not find, or which but scantily requited its passion, is the only cloud which flits across the sunshine of Keat's page, and then only dimming its brightness with the shadow of beauty always present, and never with the blackness of an aching void. For Keats was too much occupied in blending the sensuous with the ideal, to make the heart sick over the wide chasm existing between the loveliness of its spiritual conceptions and their earthly realizations. Keats has been connected with Chatterton, as the second youthful prodigy in our literature;* nor is the association unfitting. For the "Endymion," considering the youth of the writer, is as much a marvel as "Cælla or the Battle of Hastings." It has as many beauties, though these are encumbered with greater blemishes, springing, perhaps, from the redundancy of that imaginative element in which Keats was undoubtedly superior. But the comparison must not blind us to the fact, that Keats lived five years longer than his rival, and even then proved deficient in invention and pathos in which Chatterton revelled.

It would be, however, manifestly unfair to test Keats' poetry

* See *Life and Remains* by Lord Houghton, whose dispassionate criticism, and warm sympathy with the subject of his labours, have raised for Keats an enduring literary monument. The "Endymion" was inscribed by its author "to the memory of Chatterton."

by the principles we would apply to the productions of a writer who had arrived at the maturity of his powers, and in whose future there was no promise to fulfil. As well might we expect the ripe fruits of harvest in spring, as to find in the productions of youth, the mature beauties of later years. In judging of Keats, we must not take the crudities which spring from theories hastily formed, and which would have been as hastily abandoned, to guide our decision. We must take the general tone of his poetry, rather than isolated passages, the new ground which he broke, rather than what he actually accomplished, as a criterion of his powers. If we regard the spirit of originality he evinced, the lofty models he strove to emulate, and the voluptuous sense of beauty which reigns through all his conceptions, there can be only one opinion, that had he lived as long, he would have ranked as high, as any of his contemporaries. In the "Eve of St. Agnes," and in his shorter pieces, where the subject fell within the scope of his powers, he rises almost to the perfection of his art. What picture, for instance, in English poetry can surpass his portrait of Madeline?—

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
 And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,
 As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon :
 Rose-bloom fell on her hands together prest,
 And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
 And on her hair a glory, like a saint ;
 She seem'd a splendid angel newly drest,
 Save wings for heaven :—Porpyhro grew faint :
 She knelt so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.

Anon his heart revives : Her vespers done,
 Of all its wreathed pearls, her hair she frees,
 Unclasps her warmed jewels one by one ;
 Loosens her fragrant boddice, by degrees
 Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees :
 Half hidden, like a mermaid in sea-weed,
 Pensive awhile she dreams awake, and sees,
 In fancy, fair St. Agnes in her bed,
 But dares not look behind, or all the charm is fled.

Soon, trembling in her soft and chilly nest,
In sort of wakeful swoon, perplex'd she lay,
Until the poppi'd warmth of sleep oppress'd
Her sooth'd limbs, and soul fatigued away,
Flown, like a thought, until the morrow day ;
Blissfully haven'd both from joy and pain ;
Clasp'd like a missal, where swart Paynims pray ;
Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,
As though a rose should shut and be a bud again. *

His "Odes to Pysche" and the "Nightingale," and the "Lines on a Greek Vase," if they have not the classical finish of Collins, have as much depth of feeling, and far more luscious sweetness than anything Collins ever wrote. Most of his sonnets will not suffer from comparison with the best of Wordsworth's. His "Address to Fancy" only needed a little more sustained power to entitle it to be bound up with the "Allegro" of Milton :—

Sit thee by the ingle, when
The sear faggot blazes bright,
Spirit of a winter's night.
When the soundless earth is muffled,
And the cak'd snow is shuffled
From the ploughboy's heavy shoon ;
When the Night doth meet the Moon
In a dark conspiracy,
To banish Even from the sky.

In rich imagination, very few poets have equalled Keats. Every trait, even the most commonplace feature he produces, derives new splendour from being steeped in the gorgeous colours of that faculty. He piles his images one upon the other with glowing hand, like the nectared sweets Porphyro heaped up for his lover, till the dullest objects became impregnated with ideal life and beauty, and human nature is elevated to a sphere of crystalline grace and purity of which we have but few outward manifestations. Where the objective sublime is not interwoven,

* "The Eve of St. Agnes," sts. 25, 26, 27.

as it frequently is, with the body of his subject, he easily attains it with a stroke of his pen, as,

Scowl on, ye Fates ! until the firmament
Outblackens Erebus, and the full cavern'd earth
Crumbles into itself.*

or,

At this with madden'd stare
And lifted hands, and trembling lips he stood,
Like old Deucalion mountain'd o'er the flood,
Or blind old Orion hungry for the morn.†

or,

I shall die
Like a sick eagle gazing on the sky.

Had the story of Isabella been his own, it would have derived, from Keats' manner of telling it, all the characteristics of a high class narrative poem, wanting, perhaps, nerve and fire, but still tremulous with voluptuous passion and the sad grief which springs from the violent extinction of its object. Isabella's woes, in the pages of the Italian, have an undying fragrance, but the English poet, while preserving all their original freshness, has steeped them in colours as ethereal as Homer ever threw round the deities he winged from heaven. All these excellencies in themselves would have sufficed to place Keats in the second rank of his art ; but when we consider the unripe age of the writer, and the divine promise which they manifest, it can hardly be doubted, had his life been protracted, that he would have left few names in that rank above his own. But the great merit of Keats is, that he broke away from the established schools of poetry in his day, and followed the impulse of his genius in the realization of the beautiful. The antique creations of Greece furnished him with the forms, but the passionate sentiments with which he animated them, and the philosophy of which he made them the exponents, would have been as new to the inhabitants of ancient Greece as they were to those of modern Europe. Love and beauty,—those twin

* "Endymion," b. iv., s. 122.

† *Ibid.*, b. ii., s. 198.

genii of the ideal world, it was Keats' aim to make the penates of each cottage hearth,—to domesticate permanently in every nook of perishable creation. In his poetry they became the foster guardians of this life, the powers calculated to strike selfishness out of man's nature, and restore the balance warped by Greek art on the side of sensuousness, and by Christian art on the side of dry spirituality, in favour of a union which should combine the perfections of both, without the faults of either. In Keats' pages the world may satiate its thirst for material loveliness, and feel that such loveliness is but the shell or outward embodiment of its spiritual purity. In his realm, there is no antagonism as in that of Milton, or of Wordsworth. He writes like one who had penetrated into the mysteries of the universe, who had drawn closer to his embrace the spirit of loveliness enshrined in creation, and who could throw back the curtains of gross material custom, and hard encrusted prejudice, to admit his fellows to the shrine of the same divine beauty with which he was intoxicated. With Keats, paradise was continually breaking through the earth in exuberant blossoms, and he would have its breath constitute the atmosphere of man's daily life, until its pleasures became not a future uncertainty, but a present reality. But the paradise of Keats was not a heaven stripped of material loveliness, and refined into spiritual vacuity, or a sensuous harem filled with voluptuous forms, but a sphere presided over by spiritual love as well as material beauty, in which man might sink the coarser elements which degrade and perplex his life, in the harmonious development of his nature, and posterity may wander with delight for ever.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ART SCHOOL.

Tennyson.

THE law of reaction is as visible and constant in the poetic as in the moral or political sphere. It not unfrequently happens that the change in the one draws after it a revolution in the other. So it has been during the progress of the present century. The French revolution, followed by the Napoleonic wars, was one of these world-shaking epochs calculated to foster poetic genius, and arouse its loftiest energies. The effect was manifest in a crowd of writers constituting such an oasis in our literature as is not to be met with since the Elizabethan period. All that was wild and beautiful, grand or romantic, found gifted exponents and appropriate expression. The world was startled by the appearance of some six or seven poets, each moving in a separate sphere, each dominating their age, each striving with Titanic force to impel the national taste into opposite paths, quite different from any trodden or opened out before. But the relapse came. The political ferment of Europe settled down into certain abiding channels. The old institutions were revived again, with a few of their obsolete gables removed. Everything took a stereotyped shape. It appeared as if man's fate was fixed by destiny, and his struggles, like those of Enceladus, only led to the belching of volcanic fires, without ridding him of the incubus that pressed upon his powers. Men grew

patient of their burdens, and reconciled themselves to the situation. They accepted the philosophy of fortitude, as taught in the school of resignation, and practised by the disciples of despair. They even regarded their miseries in the light of something good, as the disciplinary school of the virtues. Passion, or the yearning after a lofty sensuous ideal, was rebuked. Any notable advance to human perfectibility in this world was treated as the dream of Utopists. As the French, after overflowing Europe with their republican notions, settled down under the petty edifice of constitutional government, so the spirituality which, in the last poets, had overflowed the great ocean of Greek philosophy, quietly subsided into the four corners of the village catechism. The outbranching energies of science, the numerous fields of commercial enterprise, the growth of the mechanical arts, each contributed to materialize men's minds, and to teach them to look to women for the softer influences, the etherealizing effects, formerly derived from æsthetic pursuits. As in the age of feudal violence, men, after the shocks of mailed warfare, leant with renewed trust on women, so after absorption in the fierce struggles of iron-handed competition, a similar submission is gracefully yielded to their supremacy in matters of spiritual interest. The feudal age combined its loftier pleasures with its duties; an economic age, with its utilities. But as man's scale in the æsthetic balance goes down, woman's invariably goes up. Under her influence, music, of the three sister-arts, acquired the greatest pre-eminence. Then followed—*proxima, sed longo intervallo*—painting. Poetry brought up the rear. The consequence is, that poetry began to be valued only as a medium of reflecting the features of her two younger sisters. Poetic conceptions gained in grace and ease what they lost in force and originality. The visions of the bard's brain were considered solely from an artistic point of view. Poetry became the handmaid of painting, not its master: all views inconsistent with cloistered morality or prevailing dogmas vanished. The higher drama, founded much more than people

think upon strong metaphysical conceptions, at once disappeared, and the commonalty, unrestrained by any exercise of better judgment on the part of their superiors, went in for scenic illusions, for gorgeous upholsteries, for hairbreadth escapes, for piratical fires, and sensational denouements. The corruption of the novel followed in the wake of dramatic degeneracy. Both are manifest signs that the organization of art in its higher range is too contracted, its pulsations too weak, to strike deep root among the masses of the community. Of that organization, these are the three great characteristics: first, the mediæval wail over the necessity of enduring evil as a stepping-stone to good; second, the intrusion of morality into the domain of art; third, subjection to women as the etherealizing element. And these three great principles are represented in the poetry of Alfred Tennyson.

In the infancy and growth of a language, poets may achieve great distinction by the introduction of new metres, or by improving those in being to such an extent as to substitute music for dissonance, and beauty of form for clumsiness of expression. It is for their force of style, for vigour of execution, that Chaucer and Dryden are so distinguished, rather than for the splendour of their conceptions. But when a language has reached the limits of its growth, when its forms are perfected, writers are driven back for distinction upon the grandeur of their matter. Hence, all the poets of the nineteenth century who have achieved greatness have rested their pretensions upon opening out some new region of thought, or for introducing us to a sphere unexplored before. Scott resuscitated chivalry. Wordsworth struck some of the most powerful chords which bind in one chain of harmony the mind of man with the external universe. Byron idealized passion until its sensuous traits dazzled the soul with the effulgence of its own spiritual essence. The mission of Shelley was to substantialize a spiritual philosophy, by investing it with the embodiments of his own imagination. But if the age were asked what new world of thought

has Tennyson explored, what path has he discovered in the regions of mind untrodden or undreamt of before, there would be some difficulty in obtaining an answer. The fact is, Tennyson has produced nothing new to startle his contemporaries with. He has not dominated the age, but merely given back to it the modicum of spirituality it possesses, beautifully idealized, it is true, and with a melody and a pathos which show he is a genuine poet ; but still, his efforts, on account of their circumscribed range, their lack of the bold imaginative element, are by no means entitled to rank with those of the illustrious group who preceded him. The love-making of refined society, the treating woman as a sort of ethereal being, the tone of Provençal sentimentality, the philosophic enforcement of Christian ethics, the enlivening of early legends with the feelings of modern experience, all these he found in the age, and the age has seen its features reproduced with such freshness and vigour in his page, that, like another Narcissus, it has become infatuated with its own conceptions. Tennyson has idealized the thoughts of his contemporaries, and therefore his contemporaries have come to regard Tennyson as a great poet. His conceptions are colossal, because they are the reflex of their own.

What then is new in Tennyson will be found, not in the raw material, but in his manner of dealing with the sentiments he has derived from his age. His thoughts are second-hand, his treatment only peculiar to himself. Other poets take the results of science, and describe things according to appearances. Not so Tennyson. He remembers we live in a scientific age, and goes into causes with the zeal of a man who views nature from his laboratory, or of a physician who reads in palpable phenomena the secret agents at work in their production. The transmission of life from parent to offspring by means of the umbilical cord is hardly a subject for poetical treatment. But Tennyson has turned the scientific fact to account in a line communicative of very deep feeling :—

Hath still'd the life that beat from thee.*

Shakespeare tells us that dew falls from heaven. He had not the advantage of being acquainted with Well's theory. Tennyson has, and gives us the benefit of it. In describing the dress of the Princess, he tells us how it hung :—

Thicker down the front
With pearls than the sward with drops of dew,
When all night long a cloud clings to the hill,
And with the dawn dispersing, lets the day
Strike where it clung.

Tennyson also cannot describe the same lady without connecting her with the Copernican theory :—

All beauty compressed in a female form
The Princess ; like to the inhabitant
Of some clear planet close upon the sun,
Than our man's earth.

An ordinary poet in describing the coming on of evening would confine himself to effects, as in "Parasina :"—

And in the heavens a darker blue,
And on the leaf a browner hue.

But Tennyson very scientifically reminds us of Galileo's doctrine :—

He fled on, and hill and wood
Went ever streaming by him, till the gloom
That follows on the turning of the world
Darkened the common path ! †

And again in lines which no reader will weary of repeating :—

Move eastward, happy Earth, and leave
Yon orange sunset waning slow,
From fringes of the faded eve
O ! happy planet, eastward go.

* "In Memoriam," vi.

† "Pelleas and Etarre."

Ah ! bear me with thee, smoothly borne
Dip forward under starry light,
And move me to my marriage morn,
And round again to happy night.

Occasionally, Galilean physics is made the source of sublime comparison :—

Look up, and let thy nature strike on mine,
Like yonder morning on the blind half world.*

And again in the most spirited of his miscellaneous poems :—

Not in vain the distant beacons. Forward, forward let us range,
Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change ;
Thro' the shadow of the globe we sweep into the younger day.
Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay.†

Geologists have shown to what extent the bed of the ocean shifts and changes its limits ; and it has also been incontestably proved of late years, that the most violent storms only affect its surface, while they leave the central body of its waters untouched. Tennyson has embodied these two facts in his "In Memoriam,"—

There rolls the deep where grew the tree ;
O earth, what changes thou hast seen,
There, where the city roars, hath been
The stillness of the central sea.‡

Meteorologists explain to us how the morning breezes arise by the cold air contracting, and the warmer being sucked or drawn in to fill up the vacuum. The operation is familiar to Tennyson, and he has given to its mechanism a poetic rendering, in a masterly sketch of the dawn :—

And suck'd from out the distant gloom
A breeze began to tremble o'er
The broad leaves of the sycamore,
And fluctuate all the still perfume.§

Most poets would describe wine or grapes with relation to

* "The Princess."

† "Locksley Hall."

‡ cxxii.

§ xciv.

their effects on the senses of man. But Tennyson goes to the root of fermentation :—

Wines that heaven knows when
Had sucked the fire of some forgotten sun,
And kept it through a hundred years of gloom
Yet glowing in a heart of ruby.*

Thomson, when he describes a thunderstorm, knew nothing about Franklin's discovery, or Robespierre's application of it to protect buildings, and therefore merely gives the effect as seen by the naked eye. But Tennyson produces the phenomena with all the effects of modern discovery :—

The electric cloud
Flaying the roots and sucking up the drains,
And shadowing down the champain till it strikes
On a wood, and takes and breaks, and cracks and splits,
And twists the grain with such a roar, that earth
Reels, and the herdsmen cry.†

In none of these things is there anything original. Other great poets deal with physical truths in their imaginative range, but Tennyson in their scientific aspects. They anticipate the revelations of natural philosophers, but Tennyson merely follows in their wake, and makes poetical capital out of their discoveries. In this he shows his sound sense, rather than his imaginative power. Every link in the chain of scientific law has its poetical side, and one of the peculiar features of Tennyson is to set this forth in terse and expressive language. By this means he awakens responsive echoes in the breasts of a matter-of-fact age. This is certainly merit of a very respectable, but by no means of the highest order, in poetry.

Another peculiarity in Tennyson is the extent to which he embodies the principles of art in his works. Grand conceptions generally carry the writer out of himself. The poet who rules supreme in the lofty sphere of imaginative passion, who lives in the region of sublimity, never descends

* "Golden Supper."

† "Princess."

to the mechanical elements of drawing.* He leaves the painter to toil after him, instead of moving in the wake of the painter. But Tennyson applies the rule and the compass to everything he takes in hand, simply because his conceptions are not of that sort which overpower the mind by their depth or immensity, but which depend for their effect on minuteness of detail and elaborateness of finish. He unceasingly appeals to the eye, as Ruskin occasionally cultivates an ideal acquaintance with the spirit. In this respect the poet and the artist are filchers upon each other's domain : just as the grocer who in our time has invaded the province of the victualler, and the vendor of the fiery spirit who *en revanche* has turned the tables the other way. Ruskin has poetized drawing, and Tennyson has imported the principles of drawing into poetry. One of these principles is that things in looming through darkness or mist seem to swell out beyond their natural size, and allowance must consequently be made for this in painting. Tennyson seldom loses sight of this feature, as in his description of Pelleas leaving the castle of Etarre, perhaps, the finest in the idyll :—

And forth he passed, and mounting on his horse ;
 Stared at her towers that larger than themselves
 In their own darkness, thronged into the moon,
 Then crushed the saddle with his thighs, and clenched
 His hands, and madden'd with himself, and moaned.

And in the "Passing of Arthur :"—

But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
 Clothed with his breadth, and looking as he walked
 Larger than human life on frozen hills.

* "I know nothing of painting. Depend upon it, of all the arts it is the most artificial and unnatural, and that by which the true sense of mankind is most imposed upon. I never yet saw the picture, or the statue, which came a league within my conception or expectation, but I have seen many mountains, and seas, and rivers, and views, and two or three women who went as far beyond it."—*Byron's Letters*.

And again in "The Princess :"—

And twilight gloomed, and broader grown the bowers,
Drew the great night into themselves.

In the "Requiescat" we get the principles of refraction :—

Fair is her cottage in its place,
Where yon broad water sweetly, slowly glides ;
It sees itself from thatch to base
Dream in the sliding tides.

And in "The Golden Supper," we get the elements of perspective :—

Then at the far end of the vault he saw
His lady with the moonlight on her face,
Her breast as in a shadow prison, bars
Of black and bands of silver which the moon
Struck from an open grating overhead
High in the wall, and all the rest of her
Drowned in the gloom and horror of the vault.

Most poets in their descriptions seize upon salient features, and leave the reader's imagination to fill up the rest of the canvas. But Tennyson describes his scenes with a minute particularity which makes us think he had either a coloured picture before him, or drew his sketch on paper, and then proceeded to put it into words. Who does not recognize Constable's painting of *The Ford*, with *Salisbury Cathedral* in the background, in the following lines ?—

A league of grass washed by a slow broad stream,
That stirred with languid pulses of the oar,
Waves all its lazy lilies, and creeps on
Barge-laden, to three arches of a bridge
Crowned with the minster's towers.

The picture of the Gardener's daughter is quite equal to any water-coloured drawing in speciality :—

One arm aloft—
Gowned in pure white, that fitted to the shape,
Holding the bush, to fix it back, she stood.

A single stream of all her soft brown hair
Pour'd on one side : the shadow of the flowers
Stole all the golden gloss, and, wavering
Lovingly lower, trembled on her waist,—
Ah, happy shade !—and still went wavering down,
But, ere it touched a foot, that might have danced,
The greensward into greener circles, dipt
And mix'd with shadows of the common ground.*

Who has not seen in the Dutch pictures at the South
Kensington Museum the

Full sea glazed with muffled moonlight swell
On some dark shore, just seen that it was rich : †

Or the Burial of the Wounded Soldier after the Battle?—

Then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land ;
On one side lay the ocean, and on one hand
Lay a great water, and the moon was full. ‡

It would be idle to deny the fineness of touch, the exquisite finish displayed, in most of these artistic pictures, but it is plain that originality cannot be numbered among their merits, as a walk through any of our modern galleries would show the sources of their inspiration.

When poets lack substantial materials, they are driven to make up for the want of bold and startling conceptions by an indiscriminate use of embellishments. To some cause of this kind may be attributed that constant use of alliteration and employment of mimetic words forcing the sound to follow the sense, which in other poets is only occasionally resorted to for ornament, but which by Tennyson is woven into the very structure of his poetry. His "Palace of Art" and "Dream of Fair Women" are full of it.

'Gardener's Daughter.' † "The Princess." ‡ "Passing of Arthur."

The golden gorge of dragons spouted forth a flood of fountain foam.

Cloisters

Echoing all night to that sonorous flow of spouted fountain floods.

Cleopatra, though bearing in her oval features the traces of her Greek descent, is represented as a

Queen, with swarthy cheeks, and bold black eyes, brow bound with burning gold.

His elegiac poetry is strewn with this mannerism [as thickly as daisies in April grass :—

On the bald street breaks the blank day.*

The breaker, breaking on the beach.†

And east and west, without a breath,
Mixt their dim lights, like life and death,
To broaden into boundless day.‡

Here she brought her harp, and flung
A ballad to the brightening moon.§

Ere childhood's flaxen ringlet turned
To black and brown on kindred brow.||

and elsewhere :—

The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
And murmurings of innumerable bees.¶

The sea,

The silent sapphire spangled marriage ring of the land.**

The shrill edged shriek of a mother divide the
shuddering night.††

Live loyal to the least wish of the Queen.‡‡

The river sloped

To plunge in cataract, shattering on black blocks
A breadth of thunder.§§

* "In Memoriam," vii.

† "The Princess."

‡ "In Memoriam," xciv.

§ *Ibid.*, lxx.

|| *Ibid.*, lxxxviii.

¶ "The Princess."

** "Maud."

†† *Ibid.*

‡‡ "Guinevere."

§§ "The Princess."

If to these peculiarities we add a studied reticence, a Saxon simplicity combined with a Greek incisiveness of language occasionally bordering upon that of the old translation of the Bible, and a corresponding gravity of tone, as if the poet even in joyful subjects was moving under a deep sense of moral responsibility, we shall get all the specialities which distinguish the Laureate from his predecessors. These differences do not consist in illuminating any new mines of thought with boldness of invention, with profuse imagery or sublime flights of imagination, but in the grave and artistic embellishments, the scientific treatment and vocal formalisms with which he has embodied the spiritual aspirations of his day. His merit lies not so much in the substance, as in the dress of poetry; not in the splendour of his materials, but in their elaborate finish and execution. In little things he is great, in great things little.

The feminine element in Tennyson assumes startling prominence, as we would naturally expect from a mind more capable of remoulding impressions derived from outward objects than impressing its own subjectivity upon others. Woman forms the topic of three-fourths of his earlier poems. His first volume, indeed, hardly consisted of any other subject. The lengthier efforts of his muse are nearly all about woman. "Maud," "The Princess," and the principal Arthurian idylls,—in all these the male characters are mere puppets of a background to bring his heroines into prominence. In the "Holy Grail" and "Pelleas and Etaire," he has brought out the masculine element; but in proportion as he has done so, his Arthurian pictures decline in strength. Now nearly all Tennyson's women are of the Belgravian stamp—delicate greenhouse exotics rather than genuine products of nature. Though he tells us very truthfully that women differ as

The violet varies from the lily as far
As oak from elm,

all the beauties of his pencil seem cast in [the same golden

mint of artistic creation, with sumptuous heads, imperially moulded forms, with throats of carven pearl, and ancles whose neatly mortised shape seem better framed for cleaving the air than treading on so gross a thing as earth. They are surrounded with gorgeous upholsteries. They move about in pavilioned gardens, in flower-perfumed air, amid glowing sun-lights, either reflected from burnished mirrors, or streaming through rose-festoons and fluctuating vine branches. They are too fairy-like to be real, or too good or wicked to be true. Here again the poet's conceptions are "minted" in the "golden moods of sovereign artists," embodying the conceptions of conventionality, but not the genuine features of nature. Every civilized age has a tendency with regard to woman ever working upwards. As it was of old in imperial Rome, so is it now. The age is endeavouring to broaden her culture, to free her from the links of feudal prescription, to assign her new civil duties and legal rights. This tendency has brought woman's mission and functions into greater prominence than ever; and revived the discussions which took place some two thousand years ago between Plato and Aristotle with respect to her sphere.* Tennyson, as the poetical exponent of his age, was bound to give this movement voice; and he has accordingly embodied the best feelings of his age with regard to woman's influence and sphere in lines which combine rich musical cadences with strong common sense, terse antitheses, and brilliant poetical imagery:—

When the man wants weight, the woman takes it up,
 And topples down the scales; but this is fixed
 As are the roots of earth, and base of all.
 Man for the field, and woman for the hearth :
 Man for the sword, and for the needle, she :
 Man with the head, and woman with the heart ;
 Man to command, and woman to obey,
 All else confusion.†

* Aristotle, *πολιτικῶν τὰ σωζόμενα* β. † "The Princess."

* * * * *

For woman is not undeveloped man,
 But diverse : could we make her as the man,
 Sweet Love were slain, whose dearest bond is this,
 Not like to like, but like in difference ;
 Yet in the long years liker must they grow ;
 The man be more of woman, she of man :
 He gain in sweetness, and in moral height,
 Nor lose the wrestling thews that throw the world ;
 She mental breadth, nor fail in children care :
 Move as the double-natured poet, each :
 Till at the last she set herself to man
 Like perfect music unto noble words.*

* * * * *

Either sex alone

Is half itself, and in true marriage lies,
 Nor equal nor unequal : each fulfils
 Defect in each, and always thought in thought,
 Purpose in purpose, will in will they grow,
 The single pure and perfect animal,
 The two-celled heart beating with one full stroke,
 Life.†

But these philosophic views, which are as old as the Stagirite, figure in a mock burlesque, while Tennyson's unreal women are reserved for his serious poetry.

The philosophy of Tennyson, instead of dominating the age, lags indeed behind it. He cannot get further than honest doubt, which he tells us is worth more than half the creeds,‡ though how he can reconcile his praise of scepticism with the ban that the Scriptures place upon it, would be difficult to conjecture. When asked for his solution of the enigma of life and death, he candidly avows he has no lights to produce which philosophy would entertain for a moment :—

If these brief lays, of sorrow born,
 Were taken to be such as closed
 Grave doubts and answers here proposed,
 Then, these were such as men might scorn.§

* "The Princess." † *Ibid.* ‡ "In Memoriam," xlvii. § *Ibid.*, xcv.

They are rather fortuitous guesses, or ill-connected hints, which cannot be pursued very far without annihilating each other. With him the popular religion still dominates philosophy at one end, while leaving it absolutely free at the other. This is the off-and-on position of the religious rationalist party, from which the present generation derives most of its spiritual culture. They stand upon a bridge one buttress of which rests upon the positivism of Comte, and the other upon the canons of Dort and the Athanasian Creed. I suppose such things are matters of necessity rather than choice, for before philosophy can be free at both ends, it must begin to disentangle itself from one of them. In the process, therefore, the fates of one generation at least must be sacrificed at the shrine of inconsistency. Of such a generation Tennyson must be taken as the poetical exponent. He combines the doctrine of the Redemption with the progressive theory of the Encyclopædists.* He does not, like Mr. Disraeli, go in for the angels. From brute to ape, from ape to man, from man to a higher cycle of being,—such are the stages of progress.† All theological systems are refractions of the divinity, more or less imperfect, none conveying absolute truth, but only such portion as is adapted to man's state, and the development of his intellect,—a very consolatory belief to those who have wedded their faith to any particular school of Christianity.

Our little systems have their day,
 They have their day, and cease to be ;
 They are but broken lights of Thee,
 And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.

The human soul, in its ante-natal state, is a part of the spirit diffused through the universe. By the act of generation it is "drawn from the void and stricken into bounds."‡ Hence the first feeling of a child is that of identification with everything it

Introductory Poem, and cxvii.

† "In Memoriam," cxvii.

‡ Concluding Poem.

sees. By experience alone it begins to feel itself a separate being, caged off, as it were, by the body from the elements of which it formed a part.* Of the posthumous state of the soul, his doctrine is more orthodox. It is not sucked back into the spiritual void, but preserves its identity in a higher sphere.† Even this view he does not consistently maintain, but glides back into the Alexandrine doctrine, that the soul at death is absorbed into the ocean of being from which it emanates.‡ If we suppose this ocean of being to be God, we get the Pantheism, not of Spinoza, but of Shelley, which Tennyson, in his last volume, mingles with the theory of Malebranche :§

The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills, the plains,
Are not these, O soul, the vision of Him who reigns?
Is not the vision He? though He be not which He seems.
Dreams are true while they last, and so do we not live in dreams?
Earth, then solid stars, the weight of body and limb,
Are they not sign and symbol of thy division from Him?
Dark is the world to thee, thyself art the reason why,
For is He not all but thou that hast power to feel I am? I
Glory about thee without thee, and thou fulfillest thy doom,
Making Him broken gleams, and a stifled splendour and gloom.

It is the jarring dissonance of these various conflicting views, pointing, like the maidens in "*Etarre*," one this way, and the other that, the consciousness that his philosophy is nothing less than a confused heap of thoughts leaping over each other in the dark, which produces in Tennyson that wail in which he compares himself to

An infant crying in the night,
An infant crying for the light,
And with no language but a cry.||

In the "*Two Voices*" the poet deals with the existence of evil and the enigma of life and death purely upon philosophic grounds,

* xiv.

† xlv., xxxiv.

‡ cxxix.

§ "*The Higher Pantheism*."

|| In "*Memoriam*," lii.

but his verses are little more than an English rendering of Goethe's, except that the casual conjectures which the German poet thought worthy of being treated only in a spirit of sportive banter, the English poet has invested with an air of sepulchral solemnity. In a philosophical point of view, we cannot, therefore, look for any guidance, or the least spark of new light, from Tennyson. He merely reproduces in melodious verse the chaotic and confused notions of his age, which ought to have its inconsistencies consigned to oblivion, rather than embalmed in an artistic urn for the amazement of posterity. The age of Dante was a religious one; that of Lucretius sceptical. The current of thought only ran in one direction, absorbing in one wide channel all the energies of the soul. Such an age has a right to be heard, to make its voice felt through its poetical exponent for all time. It also, by imparting consistent philosophical force to the poet's conceptions, stimulates a great mind to soar into the loftiest regions of imagination, and sustains him in that elevated sphere, who otherwise, wanting a solid basis for his aerial structure, would lack the enthusiastic glow of genius required for its construction, as well as sufficient groundwork for the support of great artistic creations. If we do not seek from the poet an elaborate exposition of philosophical principles, a judicial summing up of opposite opinions, he ought at least to be an unexceptionable witness, to afford us gleams of light upon the questions at issue; but if he, like Tennyson, attempts to combine systems as conflicting as those of Dante and Lucretius, he not only puts himself out of court, but leaves imagination without any ground in objective reality. His muse has no substantial nature, or intelligible functions, and cannot become the channel of lofty inspiration to humanity.

But if Tennyson in his elegiac poetry, though dealing with some of the sublimest subjects that can be grappled with by man, affords us no light except to confound our way and make our darkness more obscure, he at least scatters over his page

many pleasing pictures, evokes much profound feeling, and links a world of graceful association with the memory of the dead. Perhaps no other elegiac poet in the language strikes so many chords in the human heart, by touching those latent springs of feeling which bind the various ranks and conditions of life into one common brotherhood of humanity. The description of the change from light to dusk, and of dusk to light, of the physical, as emblematic of the spiritual, dawn;* the thirst after the new year as after a new cycle of existence;† the identification of others' sorrows with his own, and of both with the bleak aspects of nature;‡ the challenge by which Fate is defied to separate him from a soul blent with the elements of all that is good and fair around him;§ the golden reminiscences of intellectual feasts and æsthetic pastimes;|| the seraphic force of the intellect which has disappeared, foreshadowing the type of the Coming Man;—all these are rendered, fragmentary it is true, and mixed up with much that is commonplace, yet with a force which will vitalize them and make them sparkle like gems, as long as elegiac poetry occupies a shelf in our literature. But to write a poem of sustained pathos, like the “*Lycidas*” or the “*Adonais*,” I do not think Tennyson capable. His grief is always called forth by surrounding objects, upon which it leans as a crutch, and without which it could not possibly get along, instead of welling up of itself, existing apart, and only using external images as a gauge of its strength and profundity. In other great elegiac poets, the world within overflows the world without. In Tennyson, the world without completely dominates the world within. We feel nothing of his sorrow except through the agency of material phenomena. Let the reader compare the lines Burns wrote on the death-day of the Highland Mary, with the best of the pieces Tennyson has written on the commemoration of young Hallam's decease,¶ and he will find the difference between artistic pictures imaging sadness in gloom and storm,

* xciv., lxxxv.

† lxxxii.

‡ vi., xiii., vii.

§ cxxix.

|| lxxxviii.

¶ lxxi., xcvi.

and that pathetic strength which arises out of the mind, dashing its own anguish upon the world with the force of a volcanic fire, and fusing down the objects which it meets until they become lost in the blaze of its own creation. Tennyson's grief, on the other hand, even at its height, is often lost among the objects which has called it forth, and through which alone it becomes apparent. On this account, though always surrounded with artistic effects, it is always straggling and intermittent. I cannot, therefore, place the "In Memoriam" on the topmost shelf of elegiac poetry. Tennyson in this department is far above Shenstone; but he has not reached the sustained loftiness of Gray, the impetuosity of Shelley, or the tenderness of Milton.

It is in the simple bucolic idyll that Tennyson may be said to have achieved his early reputation, as affording room for the exhibition of those qualities in which he so much excels, viz., exquisite pathos, artistic handling of nature, and that tender love-sentiment in which he revels, whenever an opportunity presents itself. The Queen, some twenty years ago, is reported to have taken up an early volume of his poems, containing "The Miller's Daughter;" and was so much struck with the homely beauty of the story, that she ordered a copy of the book for the Princess Alice. This first led to Tennyson's reputation in Court circles, and to the foundation of his subsequent fame. I think Her Majesty evinced great taste in selecting for her admiration a poem which combines the rustic simplicity of Bloomfield with the passion of Catullus. "The Gardener's Daughter" is a little more artistic, twining the sweetest love-memories round scenes so graphically described as to place the spots before us with the fidelity of a photograph. In "Dora," which belongs to the same group of subjects, the pathetic is attempted by the picture of a father who, at first flinty-hearted and proud, is finally crushed beneath the weight of the domestic affections. In these simple subjects Tennyson achieved early success; and five years ago he carried that success to its highest pitch by the production of "Enoch Arden."

The great merit of this poem consists in the severe simplicity of the narrative, and the profound pathos the poet succeeds in awakening, by the ungarnished recital of the story, without any of the meretricious ornaments of his art to support him. There, perhaps, never was a poem so perfectly stripped of what are usually called "fine passages," and so effective as a whole. This arises from a deep knowledge of maternal instincts, and a selection of those traits most likely to find their way to the reader's heart. But the poet never wanders out of the four corners of his narrative. He simply contents himself with idealizing a picture of heroic fortitude in a fishing hamlet of the nineteenth century. The characters are few, and of the humblest grade of life. But, however perfect such pictures may be, they do not belong to a high walk of art. Nor, considering the qualities employed in their perfect realization, do I consider their possessor entitled to claim the same rank with those who have evinced a thorough mastery over the representation of society in every phase of life, or who strike with masterly hand all the sounding chords of passion within the compass of the complex narrative poem.

The nearest approach to anything of this character Tennyson has undertaken, is "*The Princess*;" but the mock heroic mould in which the incidents are cast, removes it from the sphere of serious poetry. The beauties of "*The Princess*" are those of a descriptive and ornamental character. The defects arise out of the framework of the piece, which lacks both unity of colouring and design. The poem opens in a vein of solemn banter, but the gravity of the writer was too much for him in this field, and he falls at once from the heights of burlesque into connubial philosophy. The first half of the story has a nursery air about it; the last half sounds like a laudatory treatise upon monogamy. We cannot for a moment imagine the plot to be real without striking the feelings of puberty out of our nature. The scenes are so many phantasmagoria, in which the characters dance about like elves in a fairy tale, with no relation to actual exist-

ence. But as the grotesque parts of the poem thicken, they become more embedded in splendid ornament : we are absolutely pelted with gems of every kind. A shower of apt similes, of brilliant metaphor, is rained down upon us. Artistic touches spring up at every step. It seems a pity that on a story of such feeble pretensions to verisimilitude, so much jewellery should have been wasted, one-half of which would have made the reputation of a far inferior poet.

The following passage—which refers to the summons of the male intruders into the female college, to the presence of the Princess, after the discovery of their sex, would do credit to Beaumont and Fletcher :—

They haled us to the Princess, where she sat
High in the hall : above her droop'd a lamp,
And made the single jewel on her brow
Burn like the mystic fire on a mast-head,
Prophet of storm : a handmaid on each side
Bow'd towards her, combing out her long black hair,
Damp from the river ; close beside her stood
Eight daughters of the plough, stronger than men,
Huge women, blowzed with health, and wind, and rain,
And labour. Each was like a Druid rock ;
Or like a spire of land that stands apart,
Cleft from the main, and wail'd about with mews.*

The scene of confusion which ensues when the feminine community hear that they are girt about by a mighty army is no less felicitously painted :—

A tide of fierce
Invective seemed to wait behind her lips,
As waits a river level with the dam,
Ready to burst, and flood the world with foam.
And so she would have spoken, but there rose
A hubbub in the court of half the maids
Gather'd together ; from the illumined hall
Long lanes of splendour slanted o'er a press

Of snowy shoulders, thick as herded ewes,
And rainbow robes, and gems and gem-like eyes,
And gold and golden heads : they to and fro
Fluctuated, as flowers in storm, some red, some pale,
All open-mouthed, all gazing to the light ;
Some crying there was an army in the land,
And some, that men were in the very walls,
And some they cared not ; till a clamour grew,
As of a new-world Babel, woman-built,
And worse confounded : high above them stood
The placid marble muses, looking peace.*

But the likenesses of the chief actors are rather hit off by some apt simile than fully sculptured out before us from the rough block of circumstances, as the head of *Ida*, with

“ A single band of gold about her hair,
Like a Saint’s glory up in heaven.”†

or that of *Melissa*,

A rosy blonde, in a village gown,
* * * * * with her lips apart,
And all her thoughts as fair within her eyes,
As bottom agates seem to wave and float
In crystal currants of clear morning seas.‡

The poetry of motion was never combined with higher artistic embellishment than in the portrait of *Çamilla*, sketched in another portion of his works :—

On her head
A diamond circlet, and from under this
A veil, that seemed no more than gilded air
Flying by each fine ear, an eastern gauze,
With seeds of gold : so, with that grace of hers,
Slow moving as a wave against the wind,
That flings a mist behind it in the sun.§

* iv.

† vii.

‡ iv.

§ “ The Golden Supper.”

As a contrast to this picture may be set that of the Princess :—

Rising up,
 Robed in the long night of her deep hair, so
 To the open window moved, remaining there
 Fix't like a beacon-tower above the waves
 Of tempest, when the crimson-rolling eye
 Glares ruin, and the wild birds on the light
 Dash themselves dead.*

The following artistic touch reminds us of Gilbert Forster's best water-colour sketches :—

Many a little hand
 Glanced like a touch of sunshine on the rocks,
 Many a light foot shone like a jewel set
 In the dark crag : and then we turned ; we wound
 About the cliffs, the copses out and in,
 * * * * till the sun
 Grew broader towards his death, and fell, and all
 The rosy heights came out above the lawns.†

Even feminine sadness cannot be painted without connecting it with a landscape like that in Williams' "Storm," which we have frequently seen on canvas, but never drawn with such colours as Tennyson has put into words :—

Seldom she spoke, but oft
 Clomb to the roofs, and gazed alone for hours :
 * * * * Void was her look,
 * * * as one that climbs a peak, to gaze
 O'er land and main, and sees a great black cloud
 Drag onward from the deep a wall of night,
 Blot out the scope of sea from verge to shore,
 And suck the blinding splendour from the sand,
 And quenching lake by lake, and tarn by tarn,
 Expunge the world ; so fared she gazing there.‡

But the effects of these artistic beauties are to a great extent marred by the absurd story, and by the pale washed-out characters with which they are connected. The poet was

* iv.

† iii., *ad finem*.

‡ vii.

evidently only feeling his way. But after being twenty-seven years before the world as an author, it must be confessed that, compared with what was achieved by his immediate predecessors in one-half of the time, "The Princess" is not a lofty effort. It lacks the embodiment of the struggle between the lower and the higher instincts of the soul, which affords the widest scope for the imaginative faculty. Artistic strokes are substituted for bold flights of sublimity. We are charmed with a succession of fairy-like pictures, but never dazed by the natural electricity of passion. And even in the regions of mock burlesque, if "The Princess" should always hold a conspicuous place, it must not be forgotten that the highest excellence in the mock burlesque, which "The Princess" certainly has not, can only compete with second-rate excellence in the higher walks of poetry.

About eighteen years after the appearance of "The Princess," Europe was shaken by the clash of arms. England, after the sleep of half a century, put forth her might against Russia; Poland and Hungary were in the travail-throes of a new birth. Tennyson had in the interim become Laureate. Here, therefore, was a great opportunity for exercising his powers. Nor did he shrink from the ordeal. The result was "Maud," confessedly one of the weakest of his reflective poems. Of the heroine of this piece we are left without any distinct conception. The poem, however, embodies the whole love story from the winding up to its inception. The poet woos by stealth, as the family of Maud contemplate affiancing her to a much richer suitor. The secret lovers are, however, surprised by Maud's brother and the suitor in question at a trysting gate. A scuffle ensues, which is supposed to end in the death of the brother, and the flight of his assailant to Breton. The uncertainty of Maud's love, at the opening, the scorn with which the poet is treated by her family, the fatal termination of the whole business—each in turn conspire to produce in the poet's mind that disordered state of feeling which is supposed to correspond

with the disordered condition of Europe. Disquietude abroad, disorganization at home, afford a sympathetic field for the pent-up indignations which are seething in the poet's breast. But, with the exception of an occasional flash of great power, such as—

Like the bountiful season bland,
When the far-off sail is blown by the breeze of a softer clime,
Half lost in the liquid azure bloom of a crescent of sea,
The silent sapphire-spangled marriage ring of the land ;—*

or,

And the flying gold of the ruin'd woodlands, drove thro' the air ;—†

or,

Listening now to the tide in its broad-flung shipwrecking roar,
Now to the scream of a madden'd beach dragg'd down by the wave,
Walk'd in a wintry wind by a ghastly glimmer, and found
The shining daffodil dead and Orion low in his grave :‡

and these of so rare occurrence as to be entirely lost in the desert of commonplace by which they are surrounded, the whole character of the piece is hardly up to the level of Ebenezer Eliot. There is a spasmodic strain through the declamatory portions of the poem as if the bard was striving to be indignant and could not—just as if he heard in his narrow circle at Freshwater, that the times were out of joint, and it behoved him, as the perfunctory State poet, to show it. There is very little attempt at sketching character, and no scenic impersonation. The poem, however, is redeemed by the perfection of its metres, and by one song, which will last as long as delicate love sentiment survives in the heart of a generation capable of appreciating its expression in glowing language. But taking out this song, English literature would lose little by the destruction of the rest of the poem. Now, considering the experience of the author, the length of time in which his faculties had been ripening, and the occasion which called forth this

* iv.

† i., 3.

‡ iii.

exhibition of his fancy, there is hardly any one who will not say that as "The Princess" was only a comparative success, "Maud," with the exception of its musical embellishments, was an absolute failure.

Tennyson's mind in his later years has continued to obey the impulse first impressed upon it. He has never wandered out of the groove of his early productions. Other poets of any pretensions to greatness have generally struck out into regions undreamt of in their earlier life, emboldened by the expanding strength of genius. But Tennyson has been remarkably steadfast to his first conceptions. The Fatimas, the Claribels, the Lillians, the Eleanores, the Madelines, the Orianas of his earlier poems, have found sisterly companions in Maud and the female characters of "The Princess." The English idylls have expanded into "Enoch Arden." The "In Memoriam" has its roots in the second volume of "Miscellaneous Poems" he presented to the public. The germ of his Arthurian idylls will likewise be found among his youthful productions. The heroes of the Holy Grail, with Guinevere and Arthur, figure in the volume he published nearly thirty years since. Nearly forty years ago, Tennyson introduced his readers at Camelot to the Lady of Shalott (Elaine) and Sir Lancelot. He has evidently been ruminating over the heroes of the Round Table all his life. We should, therefore, have been prepared for a fuller embodiment of the story than he has given to us. From the first conception of the characters to the final execution, the space embraces two such poetic lives as those of Byron and Shelley. The world, therefore, is entitled to expect a great deal from a writer whose genius by many is considered to be of an epical character. Nor does he seem to have disappointed expectation. But the standard by which narrative poetry is gauged appears about as low as that by which dramatic poetry is estimated. It only remains for Art to set forth her requirements, and show how far Tennyson, after a life-long study of his subject, has fulfilled or fallen beneath them.

The feats of Arthur, the character of his Court, and the romantic incidents of his reign, come down to us invested with the magic drapery which the Crusaders imported from the East. To realize the embodiment, however, of the most imaginary stories, some attention to time and circumstance is necessary. If the account of King Arthur, in its general outline, be legendary, the myth presents itself to us nailed to a certain framework of dates, costume, belief, and manners, from which we cannot dis sever it, without interfering with verisimilitude. But Tennyson sets most of these outer envelopes in which the story has shaped itself, at defiance. His process, to say the least of it, is a very easy one. An ordinary artist would have endeavoured to reproduce the Arthurian age. He would have bored himself to death about minute details, to preserve the representative character of the piece. But Tennyson, with a happy indifference to trifles of this character, turns Arthur and his knights into sound Protestants, nearly a century before St. Austin introduced Papal rule into Great Britain. It is universally known that heraldry did not assume the appearance of a system till the twelfth or thirteenth century; but six hundred years before *fields d'or* or *d'argent* were heard of, British knights, according to Tennyson, were as punctilious about the quartering of their shields as the most fastidious barons of the old German empire. Jousts and tournaments are of Norman origin; but Tennyson makes the Knights of the Round Table as familiar with them as if they had formed the body-guard of the last of the Plantagenets. If the old romances have encrusted the story with some of these absurdities, it should have been the duty of the poet not to increase them by absurdities still more glaring, but to winnow away the chaff, and invest the myth with some appearance of reality.

A poet who produces pictures of legendary life and manners without any other shackles than his own fancy imposes on him, may by flattering the prejudices of his readers achieve a large amount of success; but when those habits and feelings he has

humoured have passed away, it becomes a question how far his work will stand the test of an age which does not find its ideals reflected there, and which brings to its appraisal other weights and measures. Now this is what Tennyson has done, and this, in a great measure, accounts for his large success. In the "Idylls of the King," he has grafted the moral conceptions of the age upon the principal characters, and worked them out just as if the modern swells of Almack's, with their conventional sentiments, were moving about to protect or avenge female honour, in the glittering gewgaws of knight-errantry. In Arthur we have the faultless perfection of a polished gentleman, whose virtues will not allow him to be jealous of his wife, and who, therefore, becomes a cuckold for his pains. Pelleas is another ideal character of our time, who, after wasting his fortunes upon a thankless woman, and trusting in a friend's promise to obtain her favour, is jilted by the one, and deceived by the other. Lancelot, who is faithful to an unlawful love, who keeps his vow by cleaving to one only, the age can sympathize with, though it cannot greatly admire; for Tennyson represents his error as intertwined with many and great virtues. Geraint is also a type in whom we recognize an old acquaintance; for who has not met with the man prepared to withdraw into rural solitude, to protect the virtue of his wife, and who makes his jealousy the torment of his whole existence? Merlin is another victim to female influence of the baser sort embodied in the form of angelic beauty. The women are, like the men, each cast in the mould of the nineteenth century. Guinevere, the faithless wife, who is caught on the sofa with Lancelot, in the usual stereotyped fashion, so constantly revealed by our Divorce Court; Enid, the simple-hearted pattern of conjugal fidelity, such as mothers are ever holding up before their daughters as the beau-idéal of wifedom; Vivien, the dissolute, and Elaine, the spotless, maiden, the one living for power and pelf, the other breaking under the incumbent weight of unrequited love,—all these are common types to

be found round our own hearth, but having little relation to an age when woman was considered a chattel, whose rights were to be upheld and whose favours purchased by violence. All these characters are invested, not only with the instincts, the conventional prudery, the ideal sentiments, but the religious belief of our day. For when the guilt of Guinevere is discovered by the King, he reads her a lecture such as an evangelical clergyman might be supposed to deliver to his spouse caught in a similar predicament. What would be thought of an artist who should introduce the polished manners of Belgravian society among the lawless knights of Charlemagne, or who should describe the savages who brought night upon the Roman Empire, doing the honours of the table, and making love in the style of the courtiers who lately used to flock to the salons of the Champs Elysée?

The fragmentary treatment of the subject evinces a want of power in the artist to handle the story as a whole, and to strike out of heterogeneous materials the unity of a great poem. All the characters in the ten idylls glance before us like so many isolated figures on a wall, having no connection beyond the common name of Arthurian idylls. Nor is the want of completeness in themselves in any way supplied by reference to a common subject. "*Pelleas and Etarre*" comprise the sixth bead on the string, but they are never alluded to before, and each coming out of blankness, fade into nothing in the most remarkable fashion, *Pelleas* spitting fire in the dark, and *Etarre* in her wizard castle mourning for a love she constantly rejected while under her walls. *Merlin* and *Vivien*, *Galahad* and *Percevale*, *Tristram* and *Isolt*, "come like phantoms, so depart." In this treatment of his subject, Tennyson has been true to the artistic conception which dominates the rest of his works. If the reader has ever been admitted into the Queen's robing-room, at Westminster, he will have seen the Arthurian story painted in panels by Dyce, whose pictures above are elaborately supported by exquisite carvings connected with the same subject, in oak

panels below. In one design we have Sir Galahad and the vision of the holy cup; in another, the parting of Arthur and Guinevere; here we behold Geraint on his foraging quest with Enid; there we are struck with Merlin's adventure with Vivian, or by Elaine's futile passion for Lancelot. In the same manner Tennyson has panelled his subject. He has treated the story from an artistic point of view, selecting detached groups for his pen, just as if he was working in the interest of the carver or the artist, and shackled by the narrow framework of time and place, instead of soaring with untired wing into the sphere of boundless creation. It is said that in thus tearing up into fragments tales which ought to have constituted episodes converging into one grand trunk of human action, Tennyson has consulted the taste of his contemporaries, who would as soon think of sitting down to an ox, as attacking a whole epic. But surely the popularity of Browning's "Ring and the Book" has dispelled the illusion. To my mind, the epic would have been more readable, and the characters would have gained in force by being weaved into a web of mutual dependence. The tales would have increased in interest, flashing light upon each other, while mingling their currents in the tide which bore the purpose of the writer on to its fulfilment. As the tales at present stand, they are like so many isolated compartments, dark and mysterious in themselves, but which, had they formed the part of a common ground plan, would have derived splendour and symmetry from each other, as they sprang up into the grace and unity of a whole. But to accomplish so much needed the talents of a great intellectual builder, the mighty force which links to his wheels a series of gigantic characters as agents in a grand design; and of these qualities Tennyson has yet given no evidence. With some presentiment of his weakness, he selected only such portions of the Arthurian story as enabled him to indulge his talent for the picturesque, and to avoid the great test of success in narrative poetry,—that is, the fidelity of his representations to actual life and manners. The types of

ideal excellence he embodies, are in connection with freaks of fancy, not with the great law of human probability. The main trunk of the story being kept out of view, Tennyson not only chose those topics most adapted for the exhibition of his powers, but in the elaboration of which he was most unfettered by the lofty requirements of art. A fragmentary treatment was thus forced upon him. With the exception of *Guinevere*, none of the idylls develop any action which bears the slightest tinge of probability, or which for a moment we can believe to be true. As each has an isolated interest, so each imparts an independent lesson. Tales of fairy land, generally served up in the nursery, steeped in the hues of divine poetry, are each made to reflect the instincts and embody the experience of the nineteenth century. The intellectual banquet generally provided for children, is served before us in the cups and ewers of the gods.

The story of "*Enid*" reminds one very much of those we read in our infantine days, in which the hero is a knight who sets out to redress wrong, and just arrives in time to rescue some maiden from distress whom he ultimately marries, and with whom he is happy for the rest of his life. The only difference is that the sequel of the story about overthrowing robbers and taking their horses ought to have been placed in the fore part of the story, and the lady, in the Castle of Doorm, to have made the story perfectly unique with those of our childhood. The poet has done, perhaps, as much as could be effected to render the characters lifelike, where there was room for natural drawing and artistic embellishment. His description of *Geraint* has always struck us as a masterpiece in this way :—

The new sun

Beat thro' the blindless casement of the room,
And heated the strong warrior in his dreams ;
Who, moving, cast the coverlet aside,
And bared the knotted column of his throat,
The massive square of his heroic breast,

And arms on which the standing muscle sloped,
As slopes a wild brook o'er a little stone,
Running too vehemently to break upon it.
And Enid woke, and sat besides the couch,
Admiring him, and thought within herself,
"Was ever man so grandly made as he?"

The simple tenderness of Enid, more confiding as it is sorely tried, the Hall of Uniol smiling in its decay, Geraint's introduction therein, and the banquet at Doorm's Castle, are given with the exquisite touches of painting on enamel. But when a sick man fainting from loss of blood cuts off at a stroke the head of a strong earl, and scatters his crowd of retainers with a single wave of the arm, we are strongly reminded of the Munchausen business. Now, no amount of descriptive talent can naturalize extravagant incidents; and plots which violate nature, however artistically embellished, cannot please for any length of time.

The story of "Elaine" in the old romances, no matter however unskilfully told, has romance enough in it to interest the most prosaic reader. Tennyson has only varied the incidents, and beyond the skilful development of the story, has not had recourse to much artistic embellishment. In this he has shown his sense; for all stories dealing simply with the affections, if complexly treated, require a hand of first-class power. When the artist has control over the chords of passion only in their simpler keys, the story would lose by any display of pretentiousness. Tennyson has narrated the story in a simple manner, relying as usual upon artistic grouping of incidents and character, rather than upon any lofty exhibition of passion. Had Byron or Pope selected such improbable subjects for their muse, what both would have made of them may be judged from the *Eloisa* of the one, and the *Haidée* or *Medora* of the other. But the loftiest exhibition of passion we get from Tennyson, in this story, where two women flung away, the one her life, and the other her honour, for the same man, is the behaviour of

Guinevere when her lord expressed a wish that Lancelot may wed her rival :—

“Yea, lord,” she said,
 “Your hopes are mine,” and saying that she choked,
 And sharply turn’d about to hide her face,
 Moved to her chamber, and there flung herself
 Down on the great King’s couch, and writhed upon it,
 And clench’d her fingers till they bit the palm,
 And shriek’d out “Traitor !” to the unhearing wall.
 Then flashed into wild tears, and rose again,
 And moved about her palace, proud and pale.*

And a second time, when the whisper is going round the royal table, of Lancelot’s new love,—

The Queen, who sat
 With lips severely placid, felt the knot
 Climb in her throat, and with her feet unseen
 Crush’d the wild passion out against the floor
 Beneath the banquet, where the meats became
 As wormwood.†

The love avowal of Elaine to Lancelot is still more simply expressed by a wish on her part to be his wife, and if she cannot be that, to follow [him through the world in any other capacity, when Lancelot sweetens his refusal by the offer of one-half of his fortune, in case she marries a poor knight :—

She neither blush’d nor shook, but deathly pale
 Stood grasping what was nearest, then replied,
 “Of all this will I nothing ;” and so fell,
 And thus they bore her swooning to her tower.‡

All this is effective in its way ; but the effect arises from the original conception of Elaine’s passion in the old romancers, and not from the artist’s treatment, which simply does no more than hold up a glass to their images and reflect the outlines of their picture. How different is Byron’s representation of one of his heroines in an analogous situation :—

* “Elaine.”

† *Ibid.*

‡ *Ibid.*

Nor once did those sweet eyelids close,
Or shade the glance o'er which they rose,
But round their orbs of deepest blue
The circling white dilated grew—
And there with glassy gaze she stood
As ice were in her curdled blood ;
But every now and then a tear,
 So large and slowly gather'd, slid
 From the long dark fringe of that fair lid,
It was a thing to see, 'not hear !
And those who saw, it did surprise,
Such drops could fall from human eyes.
To speak she thought—the imperfect note
Was choked within her swelling throat,
Yet seem'd in that low hollow groan
Her whole heart gushing in the tone.
It ceased—again she thought to speak,
Then burst her voice in one long shriek,
And to the earth she fell like stone,
Or statue from its base o'erthrown.*

The jealousy of Guinevere is painted as the petulance of a child, but that of Gulbeyaz as the passion of a sensuous woman :

When he was gone, there was a sudden change :
 I know not what might be the lady's thought ;
But o'er her bright brow flash'd a tumult strange,
 And into her clear cheek the blood was brought,
Blood-red as sunset summer clouds which range
 The verge of heaven ; * * * *
And the deep passions flashing through her form,
Made her a beautiful embodied storm.†

In " Vivien " and " Guinevere " we have most sustained bursts of passion, the one in a farewell which may last as long as the language ; the other along the whole line of passes which take place between an old artificer and a wily woman who tries to subject him to her power. The meeting of Sir Tristram and Queen Isolt afforded the poet another outlet for his powers,

* " Parasina," xiv.

† " Don Juan," Canto v., verses cviii. and cxxv.

and in the opening, as well as in some momentary flashes of passion during the interview, he is partly equal to the occasion :—

Down in a casement sat,
A low sea-sunset glorying round her hair
And glossy throated grace, Isolt the Queen,
And when she heard the feet of Tristram grind
The spiring-stone that scaled about her tower,
Flush'd, started, met him at the doors, and then
Belted his body with her white embrace.

But after the lovers had made up their quarrel, and Isolt had appeased her jealousy, just in the very crisis of the lava outburst of passion, we were hardly prepared for the following bathos :—

So then, when both were brought to full accord,
She rose, and set before him all he will'd ;
And after these had comforted the blood
With meats and wines, and satiated their hearts—
Now talking of their woodland paradise,
The deer, the dew, the fern, the forests, the lawns ;
Now mocking at the much ungainliness,
And craven shifts, and long crane legs of Mark. * * *

The love scenes between Lancelot and Guinevere are none of them brought out in their fulness, but rather hinted at than described. In the last Tournament, the poet had a splendid opportunity of alluding to them ; for the elopement is supposed to take place during the action of the poem. But all the glimpse we get of Guinevere is in a very tame picture, most unnatural as applied to a woman whose heart is seized with a guilty passion for another, and who is viewing her husband depart for the last time, while that passion is uppermost in her breast :

In her high bower the Queen,
Working a tapestry, lifted up her head,
Watch'd her lord pass, and knew not that she sigh'd.
Then ran across her memory the strange rhyme
Of bygone Merlin, " Where is he who knows ?
From the great deep to the great deep he goes ! "

a question which may be very fairly asked as to Arthur's locality in the poem. Even the last night in which they met is hurried over in two or three lines, and the whole force of the idyll is thrown into the interview between Guinevere and the King. What ought to have constituted the body of the idyll, is only made introductory to the end of it. Now, splendid as that finish is, it loses somewhat of its force from the want of breadth of treatment in the scenes which lead up to it. The old romancers only send Guinevere to a convent after the death of Arthur in the fight against Modred, in which they are both slain. This is unnatural enough, for it implies that Guinevere only relished her passion for Lancelot so long as it was guilty. But Tennyson, more unnaturally, makes the pair separate immediately upon an event which could have had no other consequence except to glue them more closely together ; for the set purpose of delivering a homily at the finish, and elaborating a farewell picture of great excellence, though the leading embellishments be taken from sources so diverse as Saint Luke and Homer :—

Then, listening till those armèd steps were gone,
 Rose the pale Queen, and in her anguish found
 The casement : " Peradventure," so she thought,
 " If I might see his face, and not be seen."
 And lo, he sat on horseback at the door !
 And near him the sad nuns with each a light
 Stood, and he gave them charge about the Queen,
 To guard and foster her for evermore.
 And while he spake to these his helm was lower'd,
 To which for crest the golden dragon clung
 Of Britain ; so she did not see the face,
 Which then was as an angel's,* but she saw,
 Wet with the mists and smitten by the lights,
 The dragon of the great pendragonship
 Blaze, making all the night a steam of fire.
 And even then he turn'd ; and more and more

* "The Acts," c. vi., v. 15.

The moony vapour rolling round the King,
 Who seem'd the phantom of a giant in it,
 Enwound him fold by fold, and made him gray
 And grayer, till himself became as mist
 Before her, moving ghostlike to his doom.

Somewhat in the same fashion, Homer represents Achilles on the point of setting forth to the ramparts, as the two armies are contending over the dead body of Patroclus :—

But up Achilles rose, beloved of heaven ;
 And Pallas on his mighty shoulders cast
 The shield of Jove ; *and round about his head*
She put the glory of a golden mist,
From which there burnt a fiery flaming light ;
 And as when smoke moves heavenwards from a town,
 In some far island by fierce foes beset,
 Who all day long with dreadful clangour crowd
 From their own town, soon as the sun was set,
Thick muffled fires along the turrets gleam,
Which rushing upward wide illumine the sky,
 And let the neighbours know who may perhaps
 Bring help across the sea ; *so from the head*
*Of great Achilles light inflamed the air !.**

Hence this farewell stands out, as it were, the fragment of a fragment. The natural incidents of the idyll are sacrificed to

* Homer, Book xviii., ls. 203—14. See also Diomedes, Book v., l. 4.

Αὐτὰρ Ἀχιλλεὺς ὦρτο Διόφιλος· ἀμφὶ δ' Ἀθήνη
 "Ὀμοῖς ἰφθίμοισι βάλλ' αἰγίδα θυσανόεσσαν,
 ' Ἀμφὶ δέ οἱ κεφαλῇ νέφος ἔστεφε διὰ θεάων
 Χρύσειον, ἐκ δ' αὐτοῦ δαΐε, φλόγα παμφανόωσαν.
 ' Ὡς δ' ὅτε καπνὸς ἰὼν ἐξ ἄστεος αἰθέρ' ἵκηται,
 Τηλόθεν ἐκ νήσου, τὴν δῆλοι ἀμφιμάχωνται,
 Οἳ τε πανημέριοι στυγερῶ κρινόνται " Ἀρηι
 " Ἄστεος ἐκ σφετέρου· ἅμα δ' ἥελίω καταδύντι
 Πυρσὸς τε φλεγέθουσιν ἐπήτρημοι ὑψόσε δ' ἀνυγῇ
 Γίγνεται αἰσσοῦσα, περικτιόνεσσι ἰδέσθαι,
 Εἰ κέν πως σὺν νηυσὶν ἀρῆς ἀλκτῆρες ἵκωνται·
 ' Ὡς ἀπ' Ἀχιλλῆος κεφαλῆς σέλας αἰθέρ' ἵκανε.

bring it about that we may get a glimpse of the hero of the story, who otherwise threatened to escape us altogether. Thus when Arthur is summoned into action, it is not to scare his enemies, but to rate his wife ; and we view him, not like other heroes, engaged amid the glitter of spears, and the clangour of arms on the battle-field, but delivering an evangelical discourse preparatory to disappearing amidst a blaze of Roman candles, and the wailing of nuns, in the chequered gloom of the night.

In "Vivien" there is more sustained power than in any of the idylls. But "Vivien" even as an episode would be incomplete, as it simply is confined to a love parley between two individuals who come we know not whence, and go we know not where. The necromantic art is largely introduced into the piece, which as it stands isolated and unconnected with any phase of real life, assumes an appearance of unreality, notwithstanding the vivid imagery and the exquisite colouring which pervade every line of it. The scenery of the piece streams with crystalline light, not coming out of the sober heavens of our sphere, but tinged with the magic hues of a fairy world. He does not, however, when dealing with the marvellous, powerfully impress us with the reality either of his characters or his incidents, and occasionally he reminds us of the creations of others who do. The following is a cross between Shakespeare's Apothecary and the wizard Michael Scott with his magical book :—

A little glassy-headed, hairless man,
Who lived alone in a great wild on grass,
Read but one book, and ever reading grew
So grated down and filed away with thought,
So lean, his eyes were monstrous ; while the skin
Clung but to crate and basket, ribs and spine.
And since he kept his mind on one sole aim,
Nor ever touch'd fierce wine, nor tasted flesh,
Nor own'd a sensual wish, to him the wall
That sunders ghosts and shadow-casting men
Became a crystal, and he saw them thro' it,
And heard their voices talk behind the wall,

And learnt their elemental secrets, powers
 And forces ; often o'er the sun's bright eye
 Drew the vast eyelid of an inky cloud,
 And lash'd it at the base with slanting storm ;
 Or in the noon of mist and driving rain,
 When the lake whiten'd, and the pine-wood roar'd,
 And the cairn'd mountain was a shadow, sunn'd
 The world to peace again : here was the man.
 And so by force they dragg'd him to the King.
 And then he taught the King to charm the Queen
 In such-wise that no man could see her more,
 Nor saw she save the King, who wrought the charm,
 Coming and going, and she lay as dead,
 And lost all use of life ; but when the King
 Made proffer of the league of golden mines,
 The province with a hundred miles of coast,
 The palace and the princess, that old man
 Went back to his old wild, and lived on grass,
 And vanish'd, and his book came down to me.

Here, as in a fairy tale, we naturally expect, on turning over the page, an illuminated picture such as makes the design of the narrator palpable to youthful imaginations. But in the analogous creations of Scott, we hold our breath suspended while we read, and see the actors as palpably as if we had been an eye-witness of the scene :—

“ I swore to bury his mighty book,
 That never mortal might therein look ;

* * * * *

“ It was a night of woe and dread,
 When Michael in the tomb I laid ;
 Strange sounds along the chancel pass'd,
 The banners waved without a blast.”

—Still spoke the monk when the bell tolled one :—

“ I tell you that a braver man
 Than William of Deloraine, good at need,
 Against a foe ne'er spurr'd a steed ;
 Yet somewhat was he chill'd with dread,
 And his hair did bristle upon his head.”

* * * * *

Slow moved the monk to the broad flag-stone,
Which the bloody cross was traced upon :
He pointed to a secret nook ;
An iron bar the warrior took ;
And the monk made a sign with his wither'd hand,
The grave's huge portal to expand.

With beating heart to the task he went,
His sinewy frame o'er the grave-stone bent ;
With bar of iron heaved amain,
Till the toil-drops fell from his brows, like rain.
It was by dint of passing strength,
That he moved the massy stone at length.

I would you had been there, to see
How the light broke forth so gloriously,
Stream'd upward to the chancel roof ;

* * * * *

It shone like Heaven's own blessed light,
And issuing from the tomb,
Show'd the monk's cowl, and visage pale,
Danced on the dark-brow'd warrior's mail,
And kissed his waving plume.

Before their eyes the wizard lay,
As if he had not been dead a day.
His hoary beard in silver roll'd,
He seemed some seventy winters old ;
A palmer's amice wrapp'd him round,
With a wrought Spanish baldric bound,
Like a pilgrim from beyond the sea :
His left hand held his book of might ;
A silver cross was in his right ;
The lamp was placed beside his knee.
High and majestic was his look,
At which the fellest fiends had shook ;

* * * * *

And when the priest his death-prayer had pray'd,
Thus unto Deloraine he said :—
“ Now speed thee what thou hast to do,
Or, warrior, we may dearly rue ;
For those, thou may'st not look upon,
Are gathering fast round the yawning stone ! ”

Then Deloraine, in terror, took
 From the cold hand the mighty book,
 With iron clasp'd, and with iron bound :
 He thought, as he took it, the dead man frown'd ;
 But the glare of the sepulchral light,
 Perchance, had dazzled the warrior's sight.
 When the huge stone sunk o'er the tomb,
 The night return'd in double gloom ;
 For the moon had gone down, and the stars were few ;
 And, as the knight and priest withdrew,
 With wavering steps and dizzy brain,
 They hardly might the postern gain.
 'Tis said, as through the aisles they pass'd,
 They heard strange noises on the blast ;
 And through the cloister-galleries small,
 Which at mid-height thread the chancel wall,
 Loud sobs, and laughter louder, ran,
 And voices unlike the voice of man ;
 As if the fiends kept holiday ;

* * * * *

I cannot tell how the truth may be ;
 I say the tale as 'twas said to me.*

But breadth of conception in Tennyson seems almost incompatible with perfect elaboration of finish, and everything in "Vivien" is sacrificed to bring out the feminine element in undue prominence. In comparison with Vivien, who alone is sculptured to the life, Merlin seems more or less of a puppet used simply to afford occasions for the display of her petulancy. He does not exhibit one spark of the doating passion which old men usually evince in similar situations, but remains throughout a mere talking machine, and is overborne at last, not by the fascinations of the charmer, but by her persistency. But no one can gainsay the truthfulness of Vivien's bursts of passionate sentiment. Though used as means to gain a fiery charm, they have all the force of flesh-and-blood creation :—

* "Lay of the Last Minstrel," Canto ii., verses 15, 22.

Merlin spoke in words part heard, in whispers part,
Half-suffocated in the hoary fell
And many-winter'd fleece of throat and chin.
But Vivien, gathering somewhat of his mood,
And hearing "harlot" muttered twice or thrice,
Leapt from her session on his lap, and stood
Stiff as a viper frozen ; loathsome sight !
How from the rosy lips of life and love,
Flash'd the bare-grinning skeleton of death !
White was her cheek ; sharp breaths of anger puff'd
Her fiery nostril out ; her hand half-clench'd
Went faltering sideways downward to her belt,
And feeling ; had she found a dagger there,
(For in a wink the false love turns to hate,)
She would have stabb'd him ; but she found it not :
His eye was calm, and suddenly she took
To bitter weeping, like a beaten child,
A long, long weeping, not consolable.
Then her false voice made way, broken with sobs :
"O crueller than was ever told in tale,
Or sung in song ! O vainly lavished love !"

* * * * *

She mused a little, and then clapt her hands
Together with a wailing shriek, and said :
"Stabb'd thro' the heart's affections to the heart !
Seeth'd like the kid in its own mother's milk !
Killed with a word worse than a life of blows !
I thought that he was gentle, being great :
O God, that I had loved a smaller man !
I should have found in him a greater heart.

* * * * *

Farewell ! think kindly of me, for I fear
My fate or fault, omitting gayer youth
For one so old, must be to love you still.
But ere I leave you, let me swear once more
That if I schemed against your peace in this,*
May yon just heaven that darkens o'er me, send
One flash, that, missing all things else, may make
My scheming brain a cinder if I lie."

* Desiring the charm.

Scarce had she ceased, when out of heaven a bolt
(For now the storm was close above them) struck,
Furrowing a giant oak, and javelining
With darted spikes and splinters of the wood
The dark earth round. He raised his eyes, and saw
The tree that shone white-listed thro' the gloom.
But Vivien, fearing Heaven had heard her oath,
And dazzled by the livid-flickering fork,
And deafen'd with the stammering cracks and claps
That followed, flying back, and crying out,
"O, Merlin, tho' you do not love me, save,
Yet save me!" clung to him and hugg'd him close,
And call'd him dear protector in her fright,
Nor yet forgot her practice in her fright,
But wrought upon his mood and hugg'd him close.
The pale blood of the wizard at her touch
Took gayer colours, like an opal warm'd.
She blamed herself for telling hearsay tales;
She shook from fear, and for her fault she wept
Of petulancy; she call'd him lord and liege,
Her seer, her bard, her silver star of eve,
Her God, her Merlin, the one passionate love
Of her whole life; and ever overhead
Bellow'd the tempest, and the rotten branch
Snapt in the rushing of the river rain
Above them; and in change of glare and gloom
Her eyes and neck glittering went and came;
Till now the storm, its burst of passion spent,
Moaning and calling out of other lands,
Had left the ravaged woodland yet once more
To peace; and what should not have been, had been.
For Merlin, overtalk'd and overworn,
Had yielded, told her all the charm, and slept.

Had "Vivien" been extended into an episode, or mortised into a larger poem executed in a similar spirit, dealing with human action in its broader outline, and not with the feminine phase of a portion of it, Tennyson might have had his claim allowed to a place in the highest niche of narrative poets; but with fragmentary treatment of unreal subjects, having no reference to actual life, except as veiled in the cloud of symbolical

meaning, and even then only embodying the love phases of existence among a conventional class, he appears in the position of a sculptor who can throw off an arm or a leg with graceful finish, but who lacks the Promethean touch of making the block of marble start up with the organic semblance of living reality.

This fragmentary treatment is still more exemplified in "Pelleas and Etarre" and "The Holy Grail," which are the most wizard-like stories of the series, and exhibit more unequal treatment than any of their predecessors, to which they are manifestly inferior. In both there are occasional bursts of description, but they come and go like patches of sunlight upon the iron grey of clouds, speaking more of the veriest regions of mist and shadow than of the solid framework of our rock-bound earth. Pelleas, an ingenuous youth just knighted by Arthur, on his way to a tournament (in the sixth century) falls asleep in a wood, when

Suddenly waken'd with a sound of talk
And laughter at the limit of the wood,
And glancing thro' the hoary boles, he saw,
Strange as to some old prophet might have seemed,
A vision hovering on a sea of fire,
Damsels in divers colours like the cloud
Of sunset and sunrise, and all of them
On horses, and the horses richly trapt
Breast high, in that bright line of bracken stood :
And all the damsels talk'd confusedly,
And one was pointing this way, and one that,
Because the way was lost.

The principal damsel of this group is Etarre, whose bloom bears those crystalline tints common to the rest of the picture :—

For large her violet eyes look'd, and her bloom
A rosy dawn kindled in stainless heavens ;
And round her limbs, mature in womanhood,
And slender was her hand, and small her shape,

And but for those large eyes, the haunts of scorn,
She might have seem'd a toy to trifle with,
And pass and care no more. But while he gazed,
The beauty of her flesh abash'd the boy,
As tho' it were the beauty of her soul :
For as the base man, judging of the good,
Puts his own baseness in him by default
Of will and nature, so did Pelleas lend
All the young beauty of his soul to hers,
Believing her.

Of course, Pelleas continues fascinated with his new companion, and wins for her the prize of the tournament, but on returning home finds the castle doors of the lady by her express instructions slammed in his face. Etarre has attained her object in securing the prize, and despatches her knights to make short work of Pelleas, who, still hankering after her favours, lingers outside the walls. But the muscles and thews of Pelleas are tremendous, and the knights return sorely belaboured and contused, though bearing Pelleas back with them pinioned, as he consents to be made prisoner on condition of being allowed once more to look upon Etarre. But Etarre is still inexorable, and Pelleas is again ejected, to bemoan his fate outside the walls. A bevy of knights are now charged by Etarre to set on Pelleas all at once, who are just on the point of despatching him, when Sir Gawain interferes, drives his assailants off, and takes upon himself to plead the cause of the injured lover with the flint-hearted Etarre. The sequel may be guessed. Instead of pleading his friend's claims, Sir Gawain urges his own, and achieves a conquest. Pelleas, after lingering round the walls during a couple of nights, on the third finds the drawbridge down, and, very unknightlike, sneaks into the castle gardens by stealth, and beholds the guilty couple asleep, surrounded by a slumbering group of knights and ladies. Here there was opportunity for fine description, but Tennyson does not put forth his powers. The most we get, in this way, is the picture of Pelleas's entrance into the pavilion, which,

though evidently intended to be one of the pet passages of the poem, is beneath what Southey has achieved in introducing Thalaba to the gardens of Aloadin : —*

Wide open were the gates,
And no watch kept ; and in thro' these he past,
And heard but his own steps, and his own heart
Beating, for nothing moved but his own self,
And his own shadow. Then he crosst the court,
And saw the postern portal also wide
Yawning ; and up a slope of garden, all
Of roses white and red, and wild ones mixt,
And overgrowing them, went on, and found,
Here too, all hush'd below the yellow moon,
Save that one rivulet from a tiny cave
Came lightening downward, and so split itself
Among the roses, and was lost again.

The upshot of the whole is that Pelleas leaves his naked sword across the throats of the treacherous pair, and flies from the scene distracted to encounter Lancelot, and by this slender thread does he claim admission to rank as an Arthurian hero. The moral is palpable enough. As Vivien represents the doating folly of old men wasting their substance on wily harlots, Etarre reproduces the same lesson for the young. The story is quite of a piece with the rest of the series. It is carved out of cloud land, having no substantial basis in religion or philosophy. The characters, visionary-like, arise out of nothing, and fade into nothing. Their actions outrage all that we know of common life and manners, in order to impart a lesson which we each derive from experience, and which each is little better for knowing.

The quest for the sacred blood (Holy Grail) is one of those stories combining Persian magic with monkish tradition, so common to the middle ages. The grotesqueness of the legend has not deterred Tennyson from treating it in a serious spirit, by making the quest of the knights for the sacred cup as emblematic of that

* "Thalaba," Book vi.

God-seeking which ought to form the pursuit of every Christian soul. The Persian element of the story is brought out graphically enough. But the vague and indistinct fashion in which he has worked out the Christian aspect of the subject, the wild series of incoherent visions ending in nothing, must prove a stumbling-block to the ordinary reader. That some knights by indolence, others by a pretty face, should be turned aside from their task, and that each should succeed in the pursuit in proportion to the godlike qualities within him, is natural enough. But to realize this with any force it was hardly necessary to make Sir Galahad disappear altogether phantom-like in a cloud, and Sir Perceval get so far after him, that we hardly see anything of him but his feet. The vision of Sir Perceval, doubtless intended to be the finest portion of the poem, is, to my mind, the worst. It affects the most, and accomplishes the least. The images are incoherent. The poet has no distinct conception of his subject, and, therefore, fails to convey any notion of it to his readers. A heap of arches, bridging over gulfs and branching into cloud-land, are huddled together without any definite design beyond forming a sort of gutted pathway to a city of pearl, presumed to be for the habitation of the saints. About the worst device of "Paradise Lost" is the bridge from earth to hell,* of which Milton makes Sin and Death the architects. But as this was a plain macadamized road flung over a cyclopean archway, Tennyson evidently thought the path to heaven was a matter which ought to be attended with graver difficulty. Accordingly, we get a series of archways separated by rivers, each one of which disappears in a clap of thunder as soon as Sir Galahad reaches its successor, until that gentleman is bodily absorbed by a cloud, leaving Sir Perceval in the midst of the wreck of isolated archways to scramble back, as best he might, to communicate the result to his colleagues. Incongruous as Milton's bridge is, it looms on our sight with vivid distinctness, one end resting on the jagged rocks of Pandæmo-

* Book ii., *ad finem*.

nium, and the other on the outer rim of this globe ; but Tennyson's arches, with no other buttresses than cloud-land, beginning and ending in vacancy, seem little better than the product of disordered dreams. In the adventure of Sir Lancelot he succeeds much better, the introductory portion of which is described with Dantesque power and minuteness :—

Seven days I drove along the dreary deep,
And with me drove the moon and all the stars :
And the wind fell, and on the seventh night
I heard the shingle grinding in the surge,
And felt the boat shock earth, and looking up
Behold, the enchanted bowers of Carbonek,
A castle like a rock upon a rock,
With chasm-like portals open to the sea,
And steps that met the breaker ! There was none
Stood near it but a lion on each side
That kept the entry, and the moon was full.
Then from the boat I leapt, and up the stairs.
There drew my sword. With sudden-flaring manes
These two great beasts rose upright like a man ;
Each gript a shoulder, and I stood between ;
And, when I would have smitten them, heard a voice—
“ Doubt not ; go forward ; if thou doubt, the beasts
Will tear thee piecemeal.” Then with violence
The sword was dash'd from out my hand, and fell.
And up into the sounding hall I past ;
But nothing in the sounding hall I saw,—
No bench, nor table, painting on the wall,
Or shield of knight ; only the rounded moon
Thro' the tall oriel on the rolling sea.

To get at the meaning of all this we must allegorize. He who would find God must get over the sea of doubt, advance through the castle of belief, and seek the chambers of purity. Lancelot was wanting in the latter quality, and, therefore, though he got safely over the two former, did not realize his search. Sir Galahad did, and was bodily united with it, to the forgetfulness of everything else. Perceval, not being so dis-

entangled from earthly things as Galahad, saw the object of his quest, and prepared himself for the final fruition. "The Holy Grail" is thus, by being made emblematic of the struggle for holiness, brought with the other idylls to have a direct reference to the affairs of the day. But Tennyson in the lofty regions of spirituality was out of his depth. The fancy which could idealize a drawing-room group of Belgravian beauties, was terribly at discount when dealing with grand figures clothed with radiance, whose features should have reflected the glories and whose hands dispensed the thunders of the other world. He lacked the bold imagination necessary to crowd space with a succession of sublime shapes and intelligible incidents, and, as a substitute for a series of palpable pictures, is obliged to fly to the poor resource of allegory. But a religious poem which cannot be made sensible without reference to allegory, must be in a poor way of acquiring immortality; and I hardly think, were it not for its connection with "Vivien" and "Guinevere," that this splendid fate would be in store for the later production of the Laureate's pen.

The last instalment of the Idylls displays the same pictorial power, the same *curiosa felicitas* of language, the same keen flashing words, casting a diamond glitter round everything they touch, which distinguish him above his contemporaries, and which, in the eyes of many, are mistaken for the more substantial embodiment of lofty ideal thought, of splendid passion, and creative imagination. The story of Gareth and Lynette could hardly have been better told. There is a brilliancy of colour, a minuteness of description, and a *naïveté* of expression about every turn of it, which invests the extravagant incidents with an appearance of verisimilitude. But in order to naturalize the characters or impart a rational interpretation to their actions, we must descend to allegory, following the poet himself, who makes these allegorical characters introduce us to a further allegory; so that in "Gareth and Lynette" we get an allegory in an allegory, as in "Hamlet" we are treated to a play in a play.

For the three warriors yclept Morning-star, Noon-sun, and Evening-star, represent the several stages of existence which the soul has to pass through and overcome, before it encounters death,—

The huge man-beast of boundless savagery,

who, however, turns out to be the weakest antagonist which the soul has to subdue in its progress to a higher stage. That the grim skeleton should vanish, and resolve itself into

The *bright face* of a *blooming boy*,
Fresh as a flower new-born,

is only a poetical rendering of a truth of philosophical as well as spiritual significance. The two sisters Lyonors and Lynette may denote the moral and rational part of the soul, and Gareth the lowly virtue of humility, which the proud reason so persistently disdains, but which, in spiritual combats, is so puissant as to be regarded by religious ascetics as the queen of all the virtues. So the story is left by the poet in its present form as a riddle for wise men to spell out, while, to the great bulk of his readers, who rest content with the exoteric meaning, and do not pierce beneath the outer rind or shell, the piece can only have interest, as some of the fairy tales of Andersen have interest, which we first formed our acquaintance with in the nursery, but which, on account of the novel combination of images, the truthfulness of the pictures, and the piquancy of the narrative, we are glad to renew our acquaintance with in maturer years.

In the "Last Tournament" the poet gets on natural ground again, and we find ourselves in human company, as we wander with Sir Tristram towards Lyonesse, through the mellowing avenues of the autumn woods. Most of the scenes are painted with vivid distinctness. None of the incidents shock credibility. In this respect, the "Last Tournament" may be regarded as the most natural idyll of the series. A befitting sense of

melancholy runs 'through the whole of it, whether we regard the desolate lodge in the forest,

Or the *death-dumb* autumn dripping gloom

which darkens the closing scene ; or the thick rain which drenched both plume and mantle at the tournament, "that wan day" which .

Brake with a wet wind blowing,

and

Went glooming down in wet and weariness ;

or whether we regard the withered leaves dancing before the hall in the yellowing autumn-tide ; or the mournful moralizing of the fool Dagonet ; or the occasional glimpse which the poet gives us, along that table shore, of

The long low dune and lazy plunging sea.

But all this is only the artistic framework to a series of pictures, which, however vividly coloured, are singularly wanting in those bold strokes of character, which sculpture the history of a life out of the incidents of a page, and make the features haunt the memory for ever. In the opening scenes, the poet had a fine opportunity of representing Lancelot distracted between his passion for the queen, and the severe promptings of reason and conscience. But we get instead a mere paste-board creation of that gentleman, ill at ease and sighing wearily in the double-dragoned chair of Arthur, who has betaken himself to the wars, leaving his faithless knight, in languorous mood, to preside over the jousts in his absence. Lancelot veils his eyes, looks askance at the stately galleries, where ladies with scattered jewels shone,

Like a bank

Of maiden snow mingled with sparks of fire,

and is only roused out of this unnatural state of listlessness by the appearance of his rival, Sir Tristram, from Brittany, when,—

His strong hands gript,
And dinted the gilt dragons right and left,
Until he groaned for wrath :

for, the jaded umpire, at the sight of his rival, who appears to be the only gentleman who thoroughly enjoys himself,

Yearn'd to shake
The burthen off his heart in one full shock,
With Tristram ev'n to death.

But instead of breaking a lance with Sir Tristram, he is obliged to fling to him, as victor in the jousts, the tourney prize, the carcanet of rubies, which Sir Tristram intends for the neck of Queen Isolt, his adulterous love in Cornwall, whither he proceeds to lay the jewels at her feet.

The characters in the "Last Tournament" are very vaguely pictured. The poet succeeds much better with the fool Dagonet, whom he confronts with Sir Tristram on the morning of his journey, and whose quaint and mournful lessons admirably suit the moral tone and purpose of the idyll. For Dagonet, with the keenness of one of the Greek fates, whose functions he seems to discharge, dives into the heart of what is passing around him, fathoms the follies of Sir Tristram, and does not forbear to fling them in his teeth. In fact, Dagonet serves the purpose of the fool in "Lear," except that the Laureate infuses into his witticisms the lessons of the moralist, and makes him too philosophic for his vocation. For the taunt of Sir Tristram—

Here be they
Who knew thee swine enow before I came,
Smuttier than blasted grain—

only serves to direct the fool's keen introspective glance upon himself:—

Swine? I have wallow'd, I have wash'd—the world
Is flesh and shadow—I have had my day.

The dirty nurse, experience, in her kind
 Hath foul'd me—an' I wallow'd, then I wash'd—
 I have had my day and my philosophies—
 And thank the Lord I am King Arthur's fool.

But all this only constitutes a very effective background to the piece, and by no means supplies the place of those flashes of genius which we miss in the embodiment of the principal characters of the poem.

In this piece, we get more glimpses of King Arthur than in any other of the idylls. But these are of so broken and momentary a character, as to impart a shadowy appearance to what ought to be the most substantial feature of the poem. When the features of Arthur are sketched by Sir Tristram, though the portrait is somewhat out of place in his love-scene with Queen Isolt, the poet succeeds, as he always does in his pen-and-ink sketches, to the satisfaction of everybody :—

Methought, when first
 I rode from our rough Lyonesse, and beheld
 That victor of the Pagan throned in hall—
 His hair, a sun that ray'd from off a brow
 Like hill-snow high in heaven, the steel-blue eyes,
 The golden beard that clothed his lips with light—
 Moreover, that weird legend of his birth,
 With Merlin's mystic babble about his end
 Amazed me ; then, his foot was on a stool
 Shaped as a dragon ; he seem'd to me no man,
 But Michael trampling Satan.

But when we seek for a substantial embodiment of these features in the only exploit of Arthur which the poet records, we are doomed to disappointment. For while Sir Tristram falls asleep in

The lodge of intertwined beechen—boughs,
 Furze-cramm'd and bracken-rooft, the which himself
 Built for a summer day with Queen Isolt
 Against a shower—

and is dreaming of a struggle between Queen Isolt and his

bride for the tourney prize, the poet draws aside the curtains of space, to present his hero to us in the struggle with the northern marauders, whither he had despatched him at the opening of the poem. But Arthur, instead of performing anything worthy of note, is really little more than a powerless spectator of the doings of others :—

Arthur with a hundred spears
Rode far, till o'er the illimitable reed,
And many a glancing splash and sallowy isle,
The wide-wing'd sunset of the misty marsh
Glared on a huge machicolated tower
That stood with open doors, whereout was roll'd
A roar of riot, as from men secure
Amid their marshes, ruffians at their ease
Among their harlot brides.

Upon Arthur's blowing a great horn which hung upon a tree before the tower, the red knight within

In blood-red armour sallying howl'd to the king,—
“The teeth of hell flay bare and gnash thee flat !
Lo ! art thou not that eunuch-hearted king,
Who fain had clipt free manhood from the world—
The woman-worshipper ? Yea, God's curse, and I !
Slain was the brother of my paramour
By a knight of thine, and I that heard her whine
And snivel, being eunuch-hearted too,
Sware by the scorpion-worm that twists in hell,
And stings itself to everlasting death,
To hang whatever knight of thine I fought
And tumbled. Art thou king ? Look to thy life !”

But Arthur, seeing the knight drunk,

Deign'd not use of word or sword,
But let the drunkard, as he stretch'd from horse
To strike him, overbalancing his bulk,
Down from the causeway heavily to the swamp
Fall, as the crest of some slow-arching wave,
Heard in dead night along that table shore,
Drops flat, and after the great waters break,

Whitening for half a league, and thin themselves,
Far over sands marbled with moon and cloud,
From less and less to nothing ; thus he fell
Head-heavy, while the knights, who watched him, roar'd.

The Knights then enter the tower, and, against the wish of Arthur, who cannot make himself heard in the *mêlée*, sword the inmates right and left, and fire the building, whose flames red pulsing beat against the sky ; when the curtain falls upon Arthur vainly shouting in the midst of this little massacre, and Sir Tristram's sleep having accomplished its purpose, that gentleman resumes his journey, and Arthur once more vanishes into oblivion.

Now no one can call in question either the fidelity of the picture to nature, or the splendid aptness of the marine illustration, or the beauty of the landscape in which the scene is set ; but as far as the character of the principal actor is concerned, he is simply a very polished but very weak personage, who is jerked up and down like a wire-drawn figure, not so much in accordance with any psychological traits of character as the necessities of the poet's situation. In striking out novel similitudes, in reproducing natural scenery, or in any other artistic details, Tennyson shows himself complete master of his subject ; it is only when he comes to exhibit any grand bursts of passion, or salient features of character, that he allows his subject to master him.

Tennyson is decidedly wanting in versatility. His range of power is contracted. In the drama nothing, in epic nothing, in satire and choral poetry nothing. In that form of lyric which idealizes the love sentimentality of patrician life, he is effective, but this is only a corner of the subject, and by no means entitles him to rank with those who, like Burns and Moore, have struck all the chords of amatory song. In elegy he is strong. His exquisite pathos, his artistic touches, the melancholy moodiness of his style, lightened with broken gleams of hope, like gloom furrowed by sunlight, entitle

him to rank with Gray as the first English elegiac poet after Shelley and Milton. Gray, indeed, he surpasses in depth; but the style and execution of Gray more than compensate for this superiority, for Gray has obtained by one effort what Tennyson has failed to compass in two hundred:—at least, I suppose, there is no one who would not rather have written the “Lines in a Country Churchyard” than

“By night we lingered on the lawn,”

which is the best of the pieces in the “In Memoriam.” Among narrative poets his place is high, but certainly not so high as to place him among the first group. His conceptions are always flushed with an exquisite air of ideality; but this ideality never rises into the region of imaginative passion, or of bold sublimity. He lacks invention and sustained fire and energy, quite as much as he abounds in happy strokes of comparison, in deep pathos, and in elaborately coloured design. Hence, in heroic narrative, Tennyson’s place must always be second class. But in single idyllic subjects, which appeal to the simple feelings of the heart and the tutored instincts of the eye, we have as little difficulty in placing his name among the first.

Tennyson has only written two odes, and it would have been better for his fame had he not written any. The “Ode to Memory” has long since been consigned to oblivion; and I am sorry now to exercise an act of memory with regard to it. That on the death of the Iron Duke has been the subject of much eulogy, but it would be difficult to assign any intrinsic reason for it. The ode is simply descriptive of the burial, with rather a prosaic account of the virtues which transformed the warrior, not into a hero by any means, but into a very indifferent statesman. In prose, the thoughts would have been esteemed very flat, and such as the most mediocre rhymester of the day might have accomplished without feeling himself one inch higher on that account. What can be tamer than

No more in soldier fashion will he greet
 With lifted hand the gazer in the street.
 O friends, our chief State oracle is mute :
 Mourn for the man of long-enduring blood,
 The statesman-warrior, moderate, resolute,
 While in himself, a common good.
 Mourn for the man of amplest influence,
 Yet clearest of ambitious crime,
 Our greatest, yet with least pretence,
 Great in council, and great in war,
 Foremost captain of his time,
 Rich in saving common sense.

* * * * *

Hush, the dead march wails in the people's ears ;
 The dark crowd moves, and there are sobs and tears,
 The black earth yawns : the mortal disappears ;
 Ashes to ashes, dust to dust ;
 He is gone who seem'd so great,—
 Gone ; but nothing can bereave him
 Of the force he made his own,
 Being here, and we believe him,
 Something far advanced in state,
 And that he wears a truer crown
 Than any wreath that man can weave him.*

The only point worthy of any consideration in the poem is the awakening the spirit of Nelson to greet the ashes of his great land compeer, about to be placed by his side—a feature, by the way, very much elaborated by the newspapers of the period, before the ode made its appearance ; and which Tennyson has only rendered in the plainest language :—

“ Who is he that cometh, like an honoured guest,
 With banner and with music, with soldier and with priest,
 With a nation weeping, and breaking on my rest ? ”
 “ Mighty seaman, this is he
 Was great by land as thou by sea.
 Thine island loves thee well, thou famous man,
 The greatest sailor since our world began.
 Now to the roll of muffled drums
 To thee, the greatest soldier comes ;

* St. 4 and 9.

For this is he
Was great by land as thou by sea ;
His foes were thine ; he kept us free ;
O give him welcome—This is he.”*

The prelude to this is simply odious. Had the task fallen upon Dryden, or even Campbell, how differently would they have evoked the shades of the two heroes, making the grave luminous with the lightning flashes which defy its terrors, and with the splendour which invests the soul beyond it. But Tennyson confronted a mighty subject with the trite conceptions and weak language of Shadwell, and falls not only below his theme, but himself.

The fact is, odes require very few of those qualities in which Tennyson is most proficient, and very many of those qualities which he entirely wants. Artistic touches, pretty enamelpainting, objective diffuseness,—for these, choral poetry affords little scope. But it demands broad conceptions, great fire and impetuosity in their realization, and that architectonic skill with which the mind out of its own materials erects a gorgeous dome of spiritual creation. None of these qualities has Tennyson displayed in any force. In battle-pieces, he impresses his reader neither with the savage fury of the onslaught, nor the reel and the shock of the resisting column. His martial descriptions assume almost the dry character of a despatch, whereas Campbell and Scott make us spectators of the fray, stifle us with its smoke, dazzle us with its lightnings, and deafen us with its thunders. Let the reader compare Tennyson’s “Balaklava Charge” with the “Battle of Hohenlinden;” or the Laureate’s account of King Arthur’s fights, or of those of the Duke of Wellington’s, with the “Vision in Lochiel,” and he will realize the difference between the bugle’s martial note and that of a child’s penny trumpet. Tennyson made another effort in his “Maud” to change his pastoral pipe, in the management of which he is so effective, for the clarion of Tyrtæus ; but the attempt,

* St. 6.

though made with vast effort, was as fruitless as those terrible proclamations which Sir Charles Napier used to address to his fleet in the Baltic, and by which he led us to believe he was on the eve of annihilating the Russian empire. What, for instance, could be more spasmodic and unmeaning than the concluding lines of "Maud," culminating in the absurdity—

And now by the side of the black and the Baltic deep,
And deathful grinning mouths of the fortress, flames
The blood-red blossom of war with a heart of fire ?

Both Napier's ships and the poet's verses were equally incompetent to produce any impression upon the people for whom they were severally intended. Tennyson's eminence, indeed, in the idyll and simple pastoral subjects, seems to unfit him for the loftier summits of Parnassus. He seems entirely wanting in power to awaken dread, to arouse enthusiasm, or inspire terror. His imagination has not the power to shape awful images into palpable individualities, and flash them on the mind with the impress of truth. These are the grand tests of lofty poetry, when combined with architectonic skill ; and not delicate sentimentalities, or artistic pictures of humble life, no matter however exquisite or faultless the execution may be.

Tennyson's place among the poets of his century must be estimated according to the nature of the qualities in which he excels, and those in which he falls beneath his predecessors. If he is inferior to Campbell in the war lyric, in sublime flights of imagination, and in lofty and impassioned poetry, he certainly rivals him in exquisite pathos, while he ranks above him in the artistic embellishment and conception of his subjects, in the simple idyll of common life, and in the softer graces of conventional love sentiment. If Tennyson could never have written the "Mariners of England," or the "Last Man," Campbell could never have written "Enoch Arden," or "The Princess." "Theodora" is one of Campbell's worst productions ; in the hands of Tennyson, it

would have been one of his best. Had Tennyson written "Gertrude of Wyoming," he would have risen as high above Campbell, in the simple idyllic parts of the subject, as he would have sunk below him, in the martial or impassioned parts of it. The question is, which is the superior poet? perhaps it would appear unjust to either to pronounce an opinion. Both are great in their peculiar line of art. But Tennyson's mind has undergone more artistic training than the other. Campbell, however, undoubtedly excels in genius, Tennyson in talent. But Tennyson in his pieces always displays his talent, and Campbell only occasionally exhibits his genius. If we judge by isolated passages, the superiority would lie with Campbell; if by the average tenor of their productions, the palm might be awarded to Tennyson. But the rule of criticism is trenchant, and as Campbell succeeds far better than Tennyson in the higher walks of his art, a loftier place must be awarded to him in the English Parnassus.

Contrasted with the loftier poets of his century, the Laureate will have more difficulty in maintaining his ground. Byron is far above him in every quality except that of moral dignity, and a genuine and more catholic appreciation of the destinies of humanity. In graphic dealing with incidents of plot, in construction, in delineation of character, in the broad handling of materials; in fact, in all the qualities of narrative poetry, except, perhaps, in that of sustained amatory passion and ideal grace and tenderness, Scott will be found eminently his superior. Yet out of complex narrative poetry, in the bucolic idyll, in the artistic embodiment of simple or mythical heroic life, in deep-toned elegy and subdued pathos, Scott must own his inferiority. The question is, whether a deeper insight into the beauties of the material universe, a persistent effort to realize a broader view of the poet's office, a more multiplied excellence in the lower walks of the art, can balance the marvellous power which Scott has displayed in resuscitating chivalry? I venture to think not. The powers which Tennyson displays, in the minor

sphere of his art, are more than counterbalanced by the qualities which Scott displays in one of the higher branches alone. If Tennyson has elegiac pathos, Scott has fire and martial ardour; if Tennyson excels in artistic conception, Scott surpasses him in delineation of character. If Tennyson is superior in the ideal handling of his subjects, Scott is no less effective in realizing the rich colouring and variegated phases of actual life. In architectonic skill, Tennyson is a child, and Scott is a giant. Hence, as works of art, "*Marmion*," "*The Minstrel*," and "*The Lady of the Lake*," must always rank higher than any of the fragmentary idylls Tennyson has written, notwithstanding that in all of these, there may be glimpses into a higher order of poetic conception than was vouchsafed to Scott. The result of this view is, that in power of dealing with a great subject, Scott is far above Tennyson, and in the art of dealing with a little subject, Tennyson is far above Scott. In poetry, the ideal must ever carry it over the real, the breadth of the subject and the mode of treatment being equal. But in Tennyson the ideal is fractionized and reproduced in fragments like gleams of light through patched windows; whereas in Scott, the real is reproduced with the solidarity of an unbroken shaft of flame lighting up the whole framework of an age buried in the darkness of oblivion.

Tennyson has more kinship with Wordsworth and Shelley than with any other poets of his century. But the advantage he has over the Lake poet in passionate sentiment and in ideal grace, by no means makes up for his lack of the philosophical breadth and deep spirituality which pervade the writings of his great contemporary. Over Shelley, I do not know that the Laureate has the advantage in any one quality, which enters into the composition of the poet. To both these writers he stands in the same relation as a copyist to an original. Indeed, his poetry may be said to be a cross between the rich spirituality of the one, and the mellow plaintiveness and impassioned fervour of the other. But these two tendencies in Tennyson, instead of imparting to each other

fuller development, have stunted each other's growth. Shelley's deep passion, his lyrical sweetness, his worship of ideal beauty, lose much of their force, when checked by the double curb of monastic dogma and Wordsworthian ethics, just as the broad sweep of Wordsworth's didactic muse and his homely simplicity is strikingly impaired by being associated with feminine domination, and the refined sentiment which constitutes the amatory phase of fashionable life. The fact is, the position Tennyson has taken up in art is about as incongruous as the position he has taken up in philosophy. We have love-passion expressed in homiletic language, bald simplicity combined with perfumed conceits, and subjection to feminine influence formulated into one of the first laws of the philosophic world. His poetry, like that of the architectural fashions and dogmatic views of the day, seems to be the result of a capricious eclecticism. But Greek temples with gothic lights in Christian churchyards, or mediæval gables with Byzantine cupolas, would hardly be more conflicting than the elements Tennyson has endeavoured to blend in the same composition. In this, he has only followed his age, and not endeavoured, like his more gifted predecessors, to dominate it, by inaugurating a new school, or by launching forth startling opinions. But, considering his contracted stand-point, Tennyson, perhaps, has accomplished as much as could be achieved by a poet in his situation, and the age could hardly have produced a better or more exalted representative of its poetical capacity.

CHAPTER XII.

ANDROTHEIST SCHOOL.

Swinbourne.

THE grave and stately muse of the Laureate has produced a reaction in the pagan and voluptuous verses of Swinbourne. In Tennyson, the pantheism is incoherently allied with belief in formal Christianity. Swinbourne tramples upon Christian dogmas with the spirit of Celsus, and embraces that form of pantheism which regards man as the highest unit of intelligence, and which rejects all belief in a future state.* Woman is the favourite theme of both. But in Tennyson, she is the chaste daughter of Heaven, the home of all virtues, the nurse of all tender delight, the one gift by which the labours of life are sweetened, the golden beam gilding the world's tempests and sorrows. In Swinbourne, she is the source of bitterness, made more painful by the sweetness with which the torment is preluded, the subject of blasphemy against the most high gods, the engine of their wrath when they plot the destruction of men, the curse which makes the fruit of life turn to ashes on the lip, the strong note of discord which jars the otherwise rich concert of music, harmonizing the elements of the world. We find the root of this sentiment in

* And as a man before was from his birth,
So shall a man be after among the dead.

GENESIS.

"Atalanta," but it is conspicuous in "Chastelard," and overflows his ballads and poems. The most that can be said is, that these conceptions are new to English literature, though they are by no means in substance original, whatever novelty may be displayed in their treatment, or force in their execution. They are exemplifications in verse of the *blasé* style of the modern school of French novelists, who write like men hungering after pleasures of which they feel the bitterness, and who, though panting with desire, regard living voluptuousness as dead, in their sight, as charred ashes!

The French sensualism of the restoration-epoch, which found its features reflected in the pages of Rochester and Sedley, surrounded love with lewd mirth and coarse frivolity. But the school of which Swinbourne and Beau-delaire are the exponents, drapes its orgies with the funereal appendages of the charnel vault, and the austere sanctities of religion. By the one, Venus is introduced to us as the mother of tavern gaities, thoughtless of the morrow, scattering flowers and loose jests along her paths; by the other as a sumptuous courtesan, with her head bound with snakes, and her breasts with poisonous garlands. I think, however, there is little fear of either school domesticating itself among us. Englishmen in general are too saturnine to make love a theme for thoughtless profanity; and English women embody too many types of beauty, and protract their bloom too long, ever to inspire a sense of satiated languor or jaded reminiscence. I am, therefore, sorry that Mr. Swinbourne has so far wasted his high powers upon a style so little likely to win for him a durable reputation. These powers, judging by what he has given us, if properly directed, ought to win for him a high place in our literature. The lyrical faculty in abundance, perfect ease and skill over the harmonious cadences of the language, plastic force in moulding his conceptions, beauty of description, great fire and dash in his execution,—all these qualities do not constitute poetic greatness in themselves,

but are an earnest of that which is to come. When these qualities are accompanied with great earnestness of purpose, with great love of liberty, an intense desire to overthrow the idols of the age,—to enrich its watery veins with the blood of new thoughts and principles, and disperse its mawkish conventionalities, by recalling its tastes to the fount of genuine nature, that it may rise, Antæus-like, refreshed with giant strength, after having drank at the well-spring of its mother earth,—the assemblage of all these characteristics, in one mind, announces the first bright gleams of a brilliant future flushing the poetic horizon, like the streaks of morning in a southern latitude, when indicative of a glorious day. But to realize the great hopes of which he gives us the promise, Mr. Swinbourne must get rid of his Gallic predilections, of his airy abstractions, and his anti-Christian virulence. He must recognize in Christianity more good than he is willing to acknowledge, and in Paganism more evil than he is willing to admit. He must universalize his poetry, dealing more with its general elements, as they exist in the human breast, rather than with particular embodiments, as they exist in peculiar coteries, or sectional divisions of society. His productions, up to the present, are *caviare* to the million. None but the highly educated classes are capable of understanding them. Hence the foolish outcry which has been raised on the score of their lewdness, which to my mind they are rather calculated to restrain than excite. But it is not the first time that an offence against good taste has been construed into an outrage upon morality.

But the greatest obstacle in Mr. Swinbourne's path is a certain wordiness, which often outstrips his conceptions, and not unfrequently interferes with the delineation of them. When he has not the sterling ore of sparkling thought, he attempts to palm upon us, as a substitute, mere jingling expression. This vice is not so prevalent in his "Chastelard" as in his "Atalanta," and not so prevalent in his "Atalanta" as in his miscellaneous poetry. It, however, culminates in his "Song for Italy," which

is one of the most recent and the most prosy emanation of his muse. Efflorescence may be admitted to be characteristic of youth. But as youthful genius advances to maturity, we expect the mere flower of blossom to decline and the fruit to become manifest. In Swinbourne's case, however, these expectations have only been partially realized. The day has not yet fulfilled the bright promise of the dawn. If he improves as he gets older, the development of force is not so rapid as the earlier exhibitions of his genius led us to expect. It is not that he remains stationary, while his themes advance in interest, but that he deals with his subjects after a fashion which prevents him from doing full justice to his powers. To take Mr. Swinbourne's miscellaneous verses in the order of time, we should, I fear, have to read them, Hebrew fashion, backwards. The last poems in his "Ballads" are doubtless his first, and as we approach the beginning the increase in power is manifest. This is descending to an artifice which we should have been spared. For the merit of the verses in the first half of the volume only makes the reader more devoutly wish that those in the latter part had been committed to the flames. The "Hymn to Proserpine," the "Verses before Dawn," the Interlude, and the Match, had they been less enigmatical, would have been in Goethe's best manner. The "Dolores" evinces great force and rapidity of conception, but the analogies running through it are so profane and unnatural as to countervail the vigour displayed in its execution. What end can be really served in applying the apostrophes in the catholic litany of the Virgin, with an air of sober sadness, to the orgies of Priapus, except to outrage religious feeling, and disgust a wide section of the community? Nearly all the poems in this volume are upon love; but we get no higher conception of the passion than floats through the brain of a voluptuary when he lies in the arms of a courtesan, or when he rises late, with his brain reeling from the fumes of the last night's debauch. Whatever is against nature cannot be the subject of any lofty emotion or

grand exhibition of genius. Love takes its rise in the soul, which hallows the material phases of its enjoyment. But human nature is represented with the wrong end uppermost, when this order is inverted, and when the lower instincts are enthroned in the seat of the spiritual passion.

Few of Swinbourne's ballads and poems are likely to survive, not so much from the want of power, as from the misdirection of it. An early extinction, I fear, for the same reason is impending over "*Chastelard*," notwithstanding the force displayed in certain parts of it. The characters are false, the situation unnatural, the plot void of interest. There wants the healthy ring of human action in it. It is impossible to construct a five-act play out of a few sensual love passages between a half-crazed knight and two or three idle Court women. Besides, Mary, Queen of Scots, has not yet become the Clytemnestra of history, however much it may suit the poet's purpose to make her so. Is the highest type of feminine beauty, in Mr. Swinbourne, always to be associated with the Circes of old Rome or mediæval Italy, who did not leave the victims whom they had snared in the meshes of their beauty, the poor choice between the poison-bowl and the stiletto? Are we, when the poet surrounds us with lovely women, always to have the fable of the Syrens accepted in its literal sense, and the best handiworks of God's creation pourtrayed as banqueting on men's flesh, surrounded with the skulls of one generation, and gloating over the ruin of another? This is only a corner,—a very waste corner of passion, emblematic of the effects of its unbridled indulgence. Why should it be thrust forward in the foreground, as if it constituted the whole of the picture?

There is so much the less excuse for the one-sided development of "*Chastelard*," as the author has shown in his "*Atalanta*" great power of dealing with the broader range of human action, even when trammelled by the narrow rules of Greek art, and has produced a play which will live probably as long as anything of the sort in the language. The plot is worked out and the

characters conceived with great skill. The choruses are as lyrical as anything in "Manfred" or "Prometheus;" though they may lack the incisiveness of the one, and the sublimity of the other. The boar-slaying is a marvel of description, standing out with bold minuteness, as if the picture had been photographed from the frieze of a Greek temple. But Swinbourne has not yet fulfilled the expectations he raised by this production, which, taken by itself, would not, on account of its Greek dress and imitative spirit, be calculated to place his name very high in the third rank of our literature. It has no bearing, either metaphysical or allegorical, on the tendencies of the present time. It lifts up no curtain by which we either unriddle the past, or get a glimpse into the future. The "Atalanta" only interests us as a work of art, and, for a young poet, it is a work of great promise and nothing more.

Since the "Chastelard," Mr. Swinbourne's muse has confined itself to fragmentary pieces. I do not know whether he mistrusts his capacity to build up a great constructive poem, but, judging from his last volume, if such a feeling be entertained by himself, it will not be shared by his readers. This, though consisting of a number of detached pieces, is a notable advance upon his previous efforts. The "Songs before Sunrise," which embody the poet's pantheistic views and republican fervour, for force and vigour are unsurpassed, if not unequalled, by any isolated utterances of the same sort in our literature. There is something sublime in the conception of the world being immersed in darkness, of all antecedent developments being so many tentative approaches to the light about to dawn; and in the picture of men elate with hope, jubilant with joy or depressed with fear, according as their interests are likely to be effected by the impending change. But giving the author full credit for all the beauty of form, the graces of expression, the subtle analogies, and the linked music long drawn out, which most of these pieces manifest, it would be extremely hazardous to predict for them a world-wide reputation, on

account of the reiterated allegories, the dry abstract conceptions, and the extreme spirit of personification which they exhibit. There is a lack of human interest in them, an attempt to substitute airy abstractions for tangible realities, which go far to neutralize, if they do not entirely swamp, those high poetic gifts with which they prove their author to be endowed. If these pieces manifest a great increase of poetic power, it is increase in a wrong direction. The political and anti-Christian views which Swinbourne so fearlessly puts forth in this volume, are identical with those of Shelley. He also adopts the metres and imitates the style of his master. But with all Shelley's subtlety of intellect, with all his power of clothing abstract conceptions in musical language, Swinbourne lacks his pathos, his deep tenderness, his imaginative power, and dreamy spirituality. The constructive efforts with which Shelley idealized his doctrines in the "Revolt of Islam," and "Prometheus Unbound," Swinbourne does not even attempt to follow; and until he does so, it would be premature to forecast the place he is destined to occupy in the British Parnassus. There is, however, a terribly earnest spirit about each of these fragmentary pieces, as well as one or two leading conceptions, running through the whole of them, which stamp them all with the impress of the same image. The author supposes society in its last phase of darkness, just preceding the first faint streaks of that golden day which is about to dawn on humanity. The old faith in a personal deity is dying out:—

"Thou art smitten, Thou God, Thou art smitten, Thy death is upon thee,
O Lord,
And the love song of earth, as Thou diest, resounds through the wind of her
wings."

And the new belief of man in himself, as the highest incarnation of the godlike, is on the eve of regenerating humanity:—

"Thou art judged, O judge, and the sentence is gone forth against thee,
O God,

Thy slave that slept is awake, thy slave has slept for a span,
 Yea, man, thy slave shall unmake thee, who made thee Lord over man.
 For his face is set to the east, his feet on the past, and its dead,
 The sun rearsen is his priest, and the heat thereof hallows his head.
 His eyes take part in the morning ; his spirit outsounding the sea,
 Asks no more witness or warning from temple or tripod or tree.

* * * * *

Time's motion that throbs in his blood is the thought that gives heart to
 the skies,
 And the springs of the fire that is food to the sunbeams are light to his
 eyes.
 The minutes that beat with his heart, are the words to which worlds keep
 chime,
 And the thought in his pulses is part of the blood and the spirit of time.
 Will ye feed him with poisonous dust, and restore him with hemlock for
 drink,
 Till he yield you his soul up in trust, and have heart not to know or to
 think?
 He hath stirred him, and found out the flaw in his fetters, and cast them
 behind,
 His soul to his soul is a law, and his mind is a light to his mind.
 The seal of his knowledge is sure, the truth and his spirit are wed,
 Men perish, but man shall endure ; lives die, but the life is not dead.
 He hath sight of the secrets of season, the roots of the years and the fruits,
 His soul is at one with the reason of things that is sap to the roots ;
 He can hear in their changes a sound, as the conscience of consonant
 spheres,
 He can see through the years flowing round him, the law lying under the
 years,
 Who are ye that would bind him with curses, and blind him with vapour
 of prayer?
 Your might is as night that disperses, when light is alive in the air,
 The bow of your Godhead is broken, the arm of your conquest is stayed.*

This new spirit of regenerated manhood, which is stamped
 in the Mazzinian mould, is to find its ark of safety in a republic,
 which shall knit together the different nations in one common
 bond of fellowship and love. In the "Eve of Revolution,"
 "The Litany of Nations," and the "Mater Triumphalis," each

* "Hymn of Man."

poems of great beauty, the political views of the great Genoese republican find powerful but fragmentary exposition.

In the "Eve of Revolution," the poet, after the manner of Ezekiel, is commanded by a spirit to arouse the nations from the corners of the earth by the blast of a trumpet, to cast off the torpor which yet benumbs their limbs, and fulfil the glorious destiny for which each has been preparing in the slow night of ages :—

"I set the trumpet to my lips, and blow—
 The height of night is shaken, the skies break ;
 The winds and stars and waters come and go
 By fits of breath, and light and sound, that wake
 As out of sleep, and perish as the show
 Built up of sleep, when all her strengths forsake
 The sense-compelling spirit ; the depths glow,
 The heights flash, and the roots and summits shake
 Of earth, in all her mountains
 And the inner foamless fountains,
 And well-springs of her fast-bound forces quake ;
 Yea, the whole air of life
 Is set on fire of strife
 Till change unmake things made, and love remake ;
 Reason and love, whose names are one,
 Seeing reason is the sunlight shed from love the sun."

Asia, Greece, Italy, Spain, and the western nations, are thus apostrophised with great power, and represented as shaking off the torpor which has oppressed them in the sleep of ages. Spain and France are repentant ; but Greece and Italy pant for freedom with virginal souls unsoiled by the embraces of tyrants ; while England, overridden by the nightmare of wealth and aristocratic respectability, is the slowest of her sisters to awaken to the new light forcing its way through her eyelids. The poet in addressing Russia had, doubtless, in his ken the late ukase manumitting her serfs. The shapings of his imagination here are, therefore, even more instinct with life than elsewhere, having some solid substratum in actual truth :—

"I set the trumpet to my lips and blow,
 The night is broken northward ; the pale plains
 And footless fields of sun-forgotten snow
 Feel through their creviced lips and iron veins
 Such quick breath labour, and such clear blood flow,
 As summer-stricken spring feels in her pains
 When dying May bears June, too young to know
 The fruit which waxes from the flower that wanes ;
 Strange tyrannies and vast,
 Tribes frost-bound to their past,
 Lands that are bound all through their length with chains,
 Wastes where the winds' wings ache,
 And anguish of blind snows, and rack-blown rains,
 And ice that seals the white sea's lips,
 Whose monstrous weights crush flat the sides of shrieking ships."

In the "Litany of Nations," each European commonwealth severally and conjointly call upon their everlasting mother, earth, to cure their woes ; and by the share they already have had in developing the spirit of liberty, to complete the new birth, and usher in the golden day which the poet regards as the millennium of humanity. The republic of the future, in her present aspects, is shadowed forth under the name of *mater dolorosa*, as one wayworn and besprent with blood and dust :—

Who is she that sits by the way, by the wild way-side,
 In a rent-stained garment, the robes of a cast-off bride ;
 In the dust, in the rainfall, sitting, with soiled feet bare,
 With the night for a garment upon her, with torn wet hair ?
 She is fairer of face than the daughters of men, and her eyes
 Worn through with her tears, are deep as the depth of the skies.
 This is she for whose sake being fallen, for whose abject sake,
 Earth groans in the blackness of darkness, and men's hearts break :
 This is she for whose love, having seen her, the men that were
 Poured life out as water, and shed their souls upon air :
 This is she for whose glory their years were counted as foam,
 Whose face was a light upon Greece, was a fire upon Rome.

But in the "Mater Triumphalis," this spirit of liberty, identified with that of pantheism, is addressed in language which

combines Attic beauty of form, with all the depth and fervour of Hebrew sublimity :—

Thy face is as a sword smiting in sunder
 Shadows and chains and dreams and iron things ;
 The sea is dumb before thy face, the thunder
 Silent, the skies are narrower than thy wings ;
 Angels and gods, spirit and sense, thou takest
 In thy right hand, as drops of dust or dew,
 The temples and the towers of time thou breakest,
 His thoughts and words and works to make them new.

* * * *

Thy wings shadow the waters, thine eyes lighten
 The horror of the billows of the night ;
 The depths of the earth, and the dark places brighten
 Under thy feet, whiter than fire is white.

We have known thee, and have not known thee, stood beside thee,
 Felt thy lips breathe ; set foot where thy feet trod,
 Loved and renounced, and worshipped and denied thee,
 As though thou wert but as another god.

* * * *

The night is as a seal set on men's faces—
 On faces fallen of men that take no light,
 Nor give light, in the deeps of the dark places,
 Blind things incorporate with the body of night.

Their souls are serpents winter-bound and frozen ;
 Their shame is as a tame beast at their feet
 Couched ; their cold lips deride thee, and their chosen,
 Their lying lips made grey with dust for meat.

Then, when their time is full and days run over,
 The splendour of thy sudden brow made bare
 Darkens the morning ; thy bared hands uncover
 The veils of light and night, and the awful air.

And the world, naked as a new-born maiden,
 Stands virginal and splendid as at birth,
 With all thine heaven of all its light unladen,
 Of all its love unburdened all thine earth.

For the utter earth, and utter air of heaven,
And the extreme depth is thine, and the extreme height ;
Shadows of things, and veils of ages riven,
Are as men's kings unkingdomed in thy sight.

Through the iron years, the centuries brazen-gated
By the ages barred impenetrable doors,
From the evening to the morning have we waited,
Should thy foot haply sound on the awful floors.

The doors untrodden of the sun's feet glimmer,
The star-unstricken pavement of the night ;
Do the lights burn inside ? The lights wax dimmer
On festal faces withering out of sight.

The crowned heads lose the light on them ; it may be,
Dawn is at hand to smite the loved feast dumb ;
To blind the torch-lit centuries till the day be,
The feasting kingdoms till thy kingdom come.

Shall it not come ? deny they or dissemble,
Is it not even as lightning from on high
Now ? and though many a soul close eyes and tremble,
How should they tremble who love thee as I ?

I am thine harp, between thy hands, O mother !
All my strong chords are strained with love of thee ;
We grapple in love, and wrestle, as each with other
Wrestle the wind, and the unreluctant sea.

* * * * *

I am the trumpet at thy lips, thy clarion,
Full of thy cry, sonorous with thy breath ;
The graves of souls born worms, and creeds grown carrion
Thy blast of judgment fills with fires of death.

Thou art the player whose organ-keys are thunders,
And I beneath thy foot the pedal prest ;
Thou art the ray whereat the rent night sunders,
And I the cloudlet borne upon thy breast.

I shall burn up before thee, pass and perish
As haze in sunrise, on the red sea line ;
But thou from dawn to sunseting shalt cherish
The thoughts that led, and souls that lighted mine.

This spirit of pantheism unified with that of freedom, is again personified in "Hertha," who is introduced as speaking of herself in a series of stanzas, which for beauty, music, subtilty of conception, and ethical fitness of expression, could hardly have been surpassed by Shelley :—

I am that which began ;
 Out of me the years roll ;
 Out of me God and man ;
 I am equal and whole ;
 God changes, and man, and the form of them bodily ; I
 am the soul.

Before ever land was,
 Before ever the sea,
 Or soft hair of the grass,
 Or fair limbs of the tree,
 Or the flesh-coloured fruit of my branches, I was, and
 thy soul was in me.

First life on my sources
 First drifted and swam ;
 Out of me are the forces
 That save it or damn ;
 Out of me man and woman, and wild beast and bird ;
 before God was, I am.

* * * * * *

The storm-winds of ages
 Blow through me and cease,
 The war-wind that rages,
 The spring-wind of peace,
 Ere the breath of them roughen my tresses, ere one of
 my blossoms increase.

All sound of all changes,
 All shadows and lights
 On the world's mountain ranges,
 And stream-riven heights,
 Whose tongue is the wind's tongue, and language of storm-
 clouds, on earth-shaking nights ;

All forms of all faces,
All work of all hands,
In unsearchable places
Of time-stricken lands.
All death and all life, and all reigns, and all ruins, drop
through me as sands.

* * * * *
Hast thou known how I fashioned thee,
Child, underground?
Fire that impassioned thee,
Iron that bound,
Dim changes of water, what thing of all these hast thou
known of or found?

Canst thou say in thine heart
Thou hast seen with thine eyes
With what cunning of art
Thou wast wrought, in what wise,
By what force, of what stuff, thou wast shapen, and shown
on my breast to the skies?

Who has given, who has sold it thee
Knowledge of me?
Has the wilderness told it thee?
Hast thou learnt of the sea?
Hast thou communed in spirit, with night? have the
winds taken counsel with thee?

Have I set such a star
To show light on thy brow,
That thou savest from afar,
What I show to thee now?
Have ye spoken as brethren together, the sun and the
mountains and thou?

What is here, dost thou know it?
What was, hast thou known?
Prophet, nor poet,
Nor tripod, nor throne,
Nor spirit, nor flesh, can make answer, but only thy mother
alone.

Mother not maker,
Born, and not made;

Though her children forsake her,
 Allured, or afraid,
 Praying prayers to the God of their fashion, she stirs not for
 all they have prayed.

* * * * *

O children of banishment,
 Souls overcast,
 Were the lights ye see vanish meant
 Always to last,
 Ye would know not the sun overshadowing, the shadows and
 stars overpast.

I saw where ye trod
 The dim paths of the night,
 Set the shadow called God,
 In your skies, to give light ;
 But the morning of manhood is risen, and the shadowless soul is
 in sight.

* * * * *

For his twilight is come on him,
 His anguish is here ;
 And his spirit gaze dumb on him,
 Grown grey from his fear ;
 And his hour taketh hold on him stricken, the last of his
 infinite year.

Thought makes him and breaks him,
 Truth slays and forgives ;
 But to you, as time takes him,
 This new thing it gives.
 Even love, the beloved republic, that feeds upon freedom
 and lives.

For truth only is living,
 Truth only is whole,
 And the love of his giving
 Man's pole-star and pole.
 Man pulse of my centre, and fruit of my body, and seed
 of my soul.

In "Perinde ac Cadaver," the spirity of liberty is represented at the bedside of England, striving in vain to arouse

that sleepy old lady to the discharge of her duties, who, however, turns upon her couch and seems to loathe the mission which the tutelary goddess of humanity is thrusting upon her.

She turned and laughed in her dream,
 With grey lips arid and cold ;
 She saw not the face as a beam
 Burn on her, but only a gleam
 Through her sleep as of new stamped gold.

But the goddess with terrible tears,
 In the light of her down-drawn eyes,
 Spake fire in the dulled sealed ears,
 "Thou sick with slumbers and fears,
 Wilt thou sleep now indeed or arise ?

"With dreams, and with words, and with light
 Memories and empty desires,
 Thou hast wrapped thyself round all night,
 Thou hast shut up thine heart from the right,
 And warmed thee at burnt-out fires.

* * * * *
 "Thy poor lie slain of thine hands,
 Their starved limbs rot in thy sight,
 As a shadow, the ghost of thee stands,
 Among men living and lands,
 And stirs not leftwards or right.

"Freeman he is not, but slave,
 Who stands not out on my side;
 His own hand hollows his grave,
 Nor strength is in me to save,
 Where strength is none to abide.

"Time shall tread on his name,
 That was written for honour of old,
 Who hath taken in change for fame,
 Dust, and silver, and shame,
 Ashes, and iron, and gold."

But the respectable old lady who thinks she has done enough for general humanity, is quite satisfied with her comfortable position, and turns a deaf ear to her spiritual monitor.

The "Watch in the Night" is a spirit-stirring piece, ringing

through the heart like a trumpet, in which statesmen, priests, kings, seers, captives, exiles, Christians, warriors, and European nations are each in turn questioned as to what they think, and give their own interpretations, of the signs and tokens of the coming light which chequer their dim horizon. The vigour of the opening is sustained all through the piece :—

“ Watchman, what of the night ? ”

“ Storm, and thunder, and rain,
Lights that waver and wane,
Leaving the watch-fires unlit.
Only the bale-fires are bright,
And the flash of the lamps now and then,
From a palace where spoilers sit,
Trampling the children of men.”

* * * * *

“ Master, what of the night ? ”

“ Child, night is not at all,
Anywhere fallen or to fall,
Save in our star-stricken eyes.
Forth of our eyes, it takes flight,
Look we but once nor before,
Nor behind us, but straight on the skies,
Night is not then any more.”

“ Exiles, what of the night ? ”

“ The tides and the hours run out,
The seasons of death and of doubt,
The night-watches bitter and sore,
In the quick sand leftward and right.
My feet sink down under me,
But I know the scents of the shore,
And the broad-blown breadths of the sea.

* * * * *

“ Christian, what of the night ? ”

“ I cannot tell, I am blind,
I halt, and hearken behind,
If haply the hours will go back,
And return to the dear dead light,
To the watch-fires and stars that of old,
Shone where the sky now is black,
Glowed where the earth now is cold.”

“ High-priest, what of the night ? ”

“ The night is horrible here,
With haggard faces and fear,
Blood, and the burning of fire,
Mine eyes are emptied of sight,
Mine hands are full of the dust ;
If the God of my faith be a liar,
Who is it that I shall trust ? ”

“ Princes, what of the night ? ”

“ Night with pestilent breath,
Feeds us children of death,
Clothes us close with her gloom.
Rapine, and famine, and fright,
Crouch at our feet and are fed !
Earth where we pass is a tomb,
Life where we triumph is dead.”

The poet, in this poem, puts his readers in his position, and fills them, almost in their own despite, with the fiery ardour with which he looks forward to the coming dawn. The *Tenebræ* savours too much of Shelley's “Triumphs of Life ;” and the “Lines before a Crucifix” of certain passages in “Queen Mab,” to claim the merit of originality. Nor do I think, when luscious poetry is made the vehicle of ribald denunciation of Christianity, even when original, that the author is likely to enhance his reputation thereby. A poet should be lothe to assail with wantonness an institution with which the liveliest feelings of the majority of his readers are associated ; and Swinbourne should have remembered, even from his own point of view, that Christianity merited other treatment at his hands from the services she has rendered in crushing slavery—the subject of his abhorrence ; in proclaiming human equality—the subject of his adoration, and in bringing society nearer to the boundaries of that—I fear—imaginary millennium the dawn of which he proclaims with so much fervour.

CHAPTER XIII.

POETS OF THE AFFECTIONS.

Montgomery.

SOME men are capable of having their intellect very much extended by education. There is, however, a class upon whom education generally acts like a convex lens, rather contracting than expanding their mental vision. It is not in any complimentary sense I would rank Montgomery in the former class; for he had essentially a puny intellect, capable, however, of great expansion, under a proper system of training, which he never received. Had Burns or Shakespeare gone through a university course, the probability is their mental force would have been very much impaired. The great powers with which nature had endowed them, would have lost much of their freshness by having their vigour expended upon foreign models, upon dry inventories of fact, or the mere mechanism of language. Had Shakespeare frittered away his youth in obtaining a control over Greek iambics, it is not in the least likely "Macbeth" would have been written. Had Burns devoted his early efforts to mastering the *Principia*, it is as little likely we should have had "Tam O'Shanter." The influence of Byron's collegiate learning may be read in his "Hours of Idleness;" the consequence of his emancipation from it, in his "Manfred" and "Childe Harold." But Montgomery was born with no such creative intellect. He had none of the

regalities of the spiritual universe about him. His powers were essentially of the imitative order. He caught up the echoes of Goldsmith and Cowper, and repeated their strains very well. His sympathies were with the good of every clime ; his heart was open to the tenderest domestic charities ; his feelings swelled with every generous emotion. But his mind, imprisoned in the narrow confines of Moravianism, remained Moravian to the end of the chapter. Of philosophy in any sense, either as derived from books or from introspective contemplation, he knew nothing. Doctrinal Christianity, as he found it in the Sunday-school Catechism, he accepted as the explanation of everything. The passionate phases of man's emotional nature were by him regarded as contraband. Lofty poetry on a large scale, under such conditions, was simply impossible. A liberal education for such a mind would have done wonders. But a liberal education the Fates withheld.

It was, therefore, to some extent a mistake when Montgomery wandered into the larger fields of Song. As long as he confined himself to themes in which the elastic sympathies of his heart required no lofty effort of the intellect, the result was a success. His smaller pieces, which merely image pictures of rural love, or which describe his religious feelings, or his passion for the beauties of nature, or his sympathy for natural objects, and for the destinies of common humanity, will bear comparison with the productions of poets of greater intellectual calibre than Montgomery. Indeed, it would not be too much to say, that some half-dozen of them, as his exquisite "Tribute to the Genius of Burns," his "Common Lot," his "Night," "The Field Flower," and "The Grave," are not inferior to anything of the same class in the language. In these occasional pieces, his emotions are warmly enlisted, his æsthetic sense finds ample room for its exercise, without making any great demand upon the intellectual forces in which he was so deficient. He, therefore, hits his mark. But when he attempted

bolder flights, and constructed elaborate poems of a dozen cantos, the attempt was above his powers. If he cannot be said to have ignominiously failed, neither can he be said to have fairly succeeded. In incidental scenes, where there is play for outbursts of his sympathetic nature, or for good material description, he is effective ; but in sustained power, in recondite or strikingly original views, in the bold manipulation of his subject, in passionate bursts of imagination, in fact, in all those qualities which can alone make a lengthy poem tolerable, Montgomery is simply nowhere. Among the class whose prejudices they flattered, and whose ignorance they suited, his heavy pieces once had a steady sale. But they are fast settling down into the limbo of works which are too indifferent to be read, and yet not bad enough to be entirely forgotten.

In addition to Montgomery's mental incompetency for any protracted effort, he was wretchedly unfortunate in the choice of his subjects. Who, for example, could possibly care for an antediluvian poem, in ten cantos, on "The World Before the Flood," treated scripturally, in which the prophecy of Enoch is versified, and the story of Cain and Abel diffusively set forth ? There is much more poetry in the curt announcement of the Bible concerning Enoch, viz., "that his spirit walked with God, that Enoch was not, for God took him," than in all the apocryphal books respecting him, which Montgomery has so sedulously followed. The subject of Greenland is not redeemed from its chilliness by the fires which Montgomery's missionaries light up there. But the sudden atmospheric changes this country has undergone afforded him opportunity to indulge his passion for painting catastrophes, which he has certainly turned to account, and "Greenland" is, undoubtedly, the best of his lengthy pieces. Slavery is a trite theme, and Montgomery, in "The West Indies," did little more than express, in strong pentameters, the popular indignation on the subject. But there is no one who would not rather be the author of Cowper's brief castigation of slavery in "The Task," than the ponderous lines with which

Montgomery has only diluted the withering censure of his master. The "Wanderer in Switzerland," doubtless, owed much of its temporary success to the detestation of the French republican armies, whose oppressions it denounced. For there is nothing in the mere tale of misery inflicted which can interest the general reader, and Montgomery's ballad style of treatment does not fit it for a higher sphere than an ordinary child's reading-book. The formation of earth out of coral-reefs, with the evangelical destiny of man coming in as a pendant to his rise out of a series of megatheria, is about as puerile a conception as could possibly have been conceived. Montgomery doubtless thought the way to reconcile science with religion was to set both at war with common sense. The "Pelican Island," which embraces this effort, is likewise faulty in metre. Blank verse is a great test of a poet's powers, and Montgomery's blank verse is as weak as any in the language. It is as unmetrical as Browning's, without one atom of Browning's terseness and versatility.

Montgomery never rouses the passions or feeds the intellect, but he frequently reaches the heart. His forte is simply the development of our emotional sympathies in connection with natural objects. This ground, after Herrick and Wordsworth, he cultivates as well as any writer in our language. But this is for the most part accomplished by the use of stereotyped phraseology, which rather dominates thought than suffers itself to be the vehicle of its manifestation. His verses, therefore, lack freshness. He says in one of his prefaces, that the plot of ground he holds on the British Parnassus is no copyhold, that he borrowed it or leased it from none. But this is a delusion. Every verse he writes is coined in the mint of his predecessors. His images, his metaphors, his style of expression, are all derived from poets of the Goldsmith type. But he occasionally informs them with so much fire; he fuses them so deeply into the glowing furnace of his own sensibility, that they wear all the features of original creation. Like old vases whose

figures have been re-cast in deeper moulds, his borrowed conceptions sparkle with the brilliancy of new metal.

Montgomery's powers were contracted. He had neither a brilliant fancy, nor a lofty or passionate imagination. A sombre line of melancholy pervades the most of his productions. He could not have been facetious, had he died for it. But he is always tender, and occasionally pathetic. That quiet brooding over the abyss of the heart, the mirroring of external nature in its depths, for which the Hebrew psalmists were so conspicuous, a religious earnestness of purpose, which imported the poet's heart and brain into everything he wrote, his glowing fervour, the identification of his feelings with all the elevating tendencies of humanity—these are the qualities which have placed some of his occasional pieces on the top shelf of miscellaneous poetry. But while in some of his short pieces he rises above his models, in his lengthy and more pretentious efforts, he falls beneath them. There is a diffusiveness in these compositions which his occasional verses did not admit of; for, where Montgomery had a broad canvas to cover, the defect of early training was conspicuous in redundant expression, in a wearisome exposition of trifling details, in a lack of that vigorous grasp of a subject which could impress upon its complex branches the simple unity of a whole. The fact is, the miscellaneous verse in which Montgomery excelled was the fruit of his own solitary communings with the objects which absorbed his attention; while the staple materials of his larger pieces were all imported, at second-hand, from books. Hence, while his "Greenland" and his "West Indies" may rank, though at a respectable distance, in the same class, as the "Traveller" and the "Deserted Village," his three other long poems would rise no higher than a moderate place in the fourth division of poetry, as very good embodiments of reflex imitation. But a poet must be judged by the general arrangements of his pieces, and not by the superior excellence of some three or four minor poems; and, if tested by this standard, Montgomery will rank above Rogers, but beneath Goldsmith.

Longfellow.

BETWEEN Montgomery and Longfellow, the world will probably think there is little in common. The one, spending his life in the acquisition and distribution of knowledge, in personal intercourse with the most æsthetic minds of European capitals, in habitual oscillation between two hemispheres ; the other a shy recluse, imperfectly educated, more or less pinioned to the dusty purlieu of a second-class provincial town, and knowing nothing of society, but what he had gleaned from books. In the world of thought, however, there are as many resemblances as their exterior life presents of contrasts. Both leaven their poems very largely with the Christian element ; both are thoroughly in earnest in making poetry permeate, as it were, the very lifeblood of daily existence. The triumphs of both are intertwined with the representation of the domestic affections and the quiet charities of human life. With both, verse is only the medium of genial sympathies and moralizing lessons. Montgomery was deficient in metaphysical analysis ; so is Longfellow. Neither could construct a great poem. Both have shown great power in executing short ones. But the superior training of Longfellow is evidenced in a better choice of subjects, and his more independent genius in the original treatment to which he has subjected ideas having little merit on the score of originality.

In some respects it has been an advantage to Longfellow that he was born an American. In growing up under a state of society alien to that which had coloured the thoughts of the

eighteenth-century poets, he was in a great degree withdrawn from their influence. His thoughts were, therefore, left to clothe themselves in their own natural dress. They are never dominated by expression. In this respect, he is the most natural poet of the age. The entirely modern elements of the society by which he was surrounded, threw out the mediæval world in all its freshness before him. Its chivalries, its childlike faith, its cultivation of the ascetic virtues, its weird superstitions, its ceremonial pageantries, appeared to him in more startling contrast, with the selfish pursuits of commerce, with the coarsening influence of scepticism, with the material results of industrial development, than to a European observer. Longfellow wandered through such old towns as Bruges, Nismes, and Bologna, where the architecture and traditions of the mediæval age are still rife; or through the castellated cities on the Rhine, where its baronial feuds speak out from each topaz cliff and ruined turret, much with the same feeling as a European scholar paces the banks of the Cephissus or the Capitoline Mount. He saw nothing, in these phantom relics of the past, but its poetry. He was not tutored in a state of society, in which the mediæval world had left institutions side by side with modern creations, to stifle social development in its growth, as the ivy, with its parasitical weeds, hampers the growth of a new plant. He was, therefore, in a position to appreciate their humanizing elements, without feeling a taste of the miasma which they exhale, where they exist in a stage of social decrepitude. He, accordingly, took the mediæval gauge of the spiritual, as the actual framework of the phenomenal world, and loved to hang his pictures in it. Its representations of the invisible surround and interfuse his poetic creations, not in any narrow doctrinal, but in a wide æsthetic, sense. For the boundless savannahs of America, her wide-rolling rivers, which at their mouth spout forth, as well as drink in, a sea, if they did not nourish in his soul any visions of exquisite beauty, extended her poet's mental horizon and prevented him from entertaining contracted views of anything.

The "Golden Legend," one of Longfellow's lengthiest pieces; is, perhaps, one of the least satisfactory. The individual scenes are good; some of the fancies exquisite. But the absence of anything like a well-developed plot completely strips it of interest. The love of Elsie for Prince Henry is dealt with as a mere feeling of religious duty. It is, also, in the highest degree unnatural that a prince, under the direct influence of the devil, should, with the devil himself, behave like an upright gentleman. But Longfellow, doubtless, felt the natural development of the story would have led him to trench on ground already occupied by "Faust;" and he preferred keeping the morale intact, to provoking a comparison in which he must have felt his great inferiority. The prince and his lover, with Mephistophiles, move through a succession of ill-connected scenes, and finally wind up with a marriage, which, as we never look forward to as a result, excites no feeling except astonishment. Marriages without courtship are as tame as love without passion; and both, in the hands of a greater master of song than Longfellow, would have failed to attract admiration. The "Golden Legend," then, as a work of art, excites little feeling beyond regret that a piece which contains so many beautiful passages, which is so far removed from our spasmodic literature by the quiet serenity poured like a flood of mild sunshine through its pages, should have been so much wanting in the sense of unity and completeness.

The "Spanish Student," which is the most artistic of Longfellow's productions, will always excite and repay attention. The dialogue is easy, the situations natural, the sparkling ebullitions of fancy incessant; yet this drama lacks deeply-embodied passion, subjective elaboration of character, and an air of substantial reality. We also feel that the plot was capable of being turned to greater account. Bartolome's character is only half developed, and his sudden fall at the end gives a sketchy and unfinished appearance to the piece. It adds much, however, to Longfellow's reputation that so pleasing

a drama, one uniting so many perfections, should have come from his hands. The nineteenth-century poets have not evinced much dramatic vigour, and Longfellow's performance, in the melodramatic sphere, shines forth with the more lustre, from the flatness of the corresponding efforts which have emanated from his contemporaries.

"Evangeline," which is deservedly one of the most popular poems of the age, manifests deep pathetic force, wonderful power of scene painting, with a perfect adherence to nature, in the development of character, and the manipulation of incident. The tale is simple; but there is an epic completeness about it which belongs to few of Longfellow's productions. As a story, illustrative of the gigantic force of affection amidst the trials to which it is subjected in this world, the poem is greater than "Enoch Arden." For Longfellow's materials are fewer, and turned to greater account. The pity and emotional sympathy it excites is broader and more profound. The poem is also full of spiritual radiance. The characters, as well as the scenes through which they move, are interfused with light, which springs from a sphere beyond this world of ours. Evangeline herself blends the purity of the sweetest of Raphael's Madonnas, with the fervour and enduring love of the most tender of Correggio's Magdalenes. Earthly affection in her is radiated with all the splendours of divine love. The pursuit of a human object intensifies the angelic qualities of her nature. It is a natural sequel to such a story that Evangeline does not recover Gabriel until about to wing his flight to the skies. Her love, then, for Gabriel becomes identified with her longing for heaven itself. "Evangeline" may, therefore, be regarded as the apotheosis of human affection. As such, it contains a high moral lesson, and becomes the medium of a deep philosophy. Human nature, from what it contains of the God-like, must always lift us above the perishable. The virgin instincts of the soul defy the revolutions of space and time. Human love, instead of being an obstacle, may become the best preparatory

school for divine love, into which it may become absorbed, as a river, by the ocean. Longfellow's "Evangeline" ennobles, in the sphere of suffering, the feminine nature, quite as much as Dante's "Beatrice" in that of enjoyment. If it be of a lower order of poetic creation, it is all the more likely to be more generally appreciated, and therefore to become a more practical instrument in the elevation of humanity.

To this catholic picture of French rusticity, Longfellow has given us a contrast in the courtship of the Puritan Miles Standish; but by no means with the same power. The tale is imperfect. The appearance of the hero at the wedding of Priscilla, after the rumour of his death, is left unexplained; as also the escape of the village from the impending incursion of the Indians, after the inhabitants had been fluttered by the news, like the occupants of an unroofed and hawk-threatened dovecot. There is also no suffering to harrow up our sympathies. The successful lover does not interest us much; for he displays no heroism, and his bride only presents a pleasing picture of feminine constancy and magnanimity, upon which the poet longs so much to dwell. Puritanism rather contracts the feminine nature, but develops that of the man. Hence the character of Priscilla is only subsidiary in the piece to that of Miles Standish, who lacks, however, the stern and relentless nature of the type to which he belongs. The piece is full of graphic pictures. But the emotions are not touched. It can be readily seen that the poet's heart was not in his work. With Puritanism, Longfellow had little genial sympathy. He, therefore, did not ring out of his subject that rich music it would otherwise have yielded up at his bidding.

The rest of Longfellow's pieces, with the exception of "Hiawatha," are either short pieces or collections of such, under a common name. But many of these are of uncommon beauty, and have long since become heirlooms of the language. The "Norman Baron," the "Quadroon," and the "Village Blacksmith," each types of opposite elements of being, are thrown off by him

with the hand of a master. His ballads, if they have not the elegance of Southey, exhibit far more pictorial power and deeper spirituality. With profound Christian feeling and an exquisite spirit of playfulness, he unites in these compositions the subtle essence of the German philosophy. Indeed, in this respect, Longfellow may be regarded as the Areopagite of poetry. For what Dionysius did for doctrinal Christianity, the poet has accomplished for its moral and artistic spirit. By investing these influences with the air of a scientific spirituality, reared on a rational basis, he has increased their strength and enlarged their comprehensiveness. The union of two such potent spiritualities could not be effected without imparting a sense of freshness to the development of the poet's thought, if it did not enrich his mind with new ideas. It is by no means the least of Longfellow's merits that he combines the beautiful visions of Uhland with the devotional fervour of Montgomery, the mild wisdom of Heber with the deep spirituality of Müller. It is this combination which has stamped such an ineffaceable charm on Longfellow's miscellaneous poetry.

After Tennyson, Longfellow has been the most popular poet of the day. And, though his later productions have not supported his past reputation, he still maintains that distinction. There even are not wanting people who prefer him to the Laureate. He has certainly written a melodrama and a bucolic idyll equal to, if not above, anything of the same sort that Tennyson has, or probably could, accomplish. He has written many minor pieces which can hardly be rivaled for the combination of exquisite grace and fancy which they exhibit. But here Longfellow's superiority ends. Had Tennyson not written the "Idylls" or the "In Memoriam," his inferiority to his contemporary would have been manifest. But the power Tennyson displays, in these superior walks of his art, places him above any living contemporary. Longfellow's range is purely objective. He never attempts elegy, and if he did would probably fail in it. In the elements necessary for the execution

of a heroic poem, Longfellow is equally wanting. He lacks the power of depicting deep passion, or robing purely imaginary subjects with ideal grace and splendour. All his characters are of the earth, though his heroines invariably reflect in their mien the hues of heaven. Taking, therefore, Longfellow's excellencies in conjunction with his defects, considering his pictorial power, his command of the emotional sympathies, his sparkling fancy, his comprehensive catholic spirit, the air of novelty he has imparted to mediæval ideas, together with his lack of the imaginative element and of architectonic skill, I think the ends of poetic justice will be served in placing him in the inner circle of the first group of third-class poets. Nor need Longfellow feel, because he has not the genius of a Shelley or a Milton, that his genius is not likely to be as profitable to mankind. Poets of the first or second-class order generally stir the mind's secret springs too profoundly to be of service to them in a practical point of view. They exalt the imagination by scenes of ideal beauty never likely to be realized, and excite the mind to unprofitable yearning for the unattainable. The passions by them are roused from their depths, and the brain fevered into false creation. The intellectual horizon is extended too often at the expense of the moral element. But by poets of the third order the mental forces are seldom thrown out of their symmetrical relationship. Among them are to be found the practical instructors of mankind. They enlighten the judgment, while they warm the heart. By them the elements of human nature are not disturbed by any spiritual electricity from that natural equipoise which springs from their healthy development. They ripen the intellect and the moral sense simultaneously. They generally keep the passions within the restraints of the reason. By them the domestic virtues are cherished, and morality robed in the garb of a sparkling fancy and a sportive disposition. They habituate us to derive lessons from nature at every step. They train the æsthetic sense within us to extract

beauty from commonplace objects, hope from gloom, and sunshine from sorrow. They ripen our affections until they exhale an aroma, which sweetens the atmosphere of life. Among such teachers, it ought to form a subject of congratulation to Longfellow, that he will ever hold a foremost place.

CHAPTER XIV.

REALISTIC SCHOOL.

Crabbe.

IT is rarely, when clergymen venture into the regions of the Muses, that they cut a very conspicuous figure there. I only know of two, who, as poets, have left behind them a brilliant reputation, and their triumphs were achieved in defiance of the cloth which they wore. While Herrick and Churchill wrote their best pieces, they lived in direct hostility with their professional duties. It would seem that the daughters of memory cherish some secret antipathy to theological pursuits, or at least they have no feelings of sympathy with those who,

To wander round the Muse's sacred hill,
Let the salvation of mankind stand still.*

We all know that Young did not get on very well with them, even when he moralized his song; and Bowles, in the list of those who have acquired fame during the present century, is, perhaps, the least entitled to it. Home, who was turned out of the Presbytery for writing dramas, occupies a still lower position. Crabbe, though a poet of far more respectable pretensions, still labours under the disadvantages of his profession. Had he or Young been trained divines, it is probable what little poetical capacity either possessed would have been squeezed

* Churchill's Satire on Bishop Warburton.

out of them. But both entered the Church in mature age. They brought into the ministry a full knowledge of the world, a practical acquaintance with the miseries of life and vicissitudes of fortune. This experience was the grand store-house of Young's and Crabbe's muse. But they brought to the manipulation of the raw material the contracted views of their new profession. Human life was painted in all its shivering nakedness. The world outside the Church was the vestibule of hell. The responsibilities of the wealthy made life burdensome, the labours of the poor made life miserable. That spirit of Greek joyousness which casts such broad sunshine over Helicon, hardly illumines a single line they have written. The sense of beauty suffers in them a complete eclipse. There is no outlet from the calamities of existence except spare living, a grave demeanour, reading one's Bible, and keeping a clear look-out against the evils which are always impending over us. The world is a sort of penitentiary, and they conduct us into its wards, with black staves, in crape bands, with the starch solemnity of decorum, as if they were ushering us into a house of mourning, and nature had no feeling but sorrow.

But Crabbe, in addition to the gloom imparted by his professional bias, allowed his early miseries to impart a peculiar hypochondriac tone to his poetry. The feelings he excites are mentally depressing. He is a mere anatomist of moral diseases. We go through his poems as we would through a lazaret-house or hospital. The characters are drawn to the life. But each is the subject of a moral diagnosis. His early practice as a village doctor would seem to have inured his mind to the Æsculapian habit of probing moral diseases to their root. We admit the truth of the picture, but feel that the poet has drawn his subjects from the darkest side of human life. Crabbe has been called the Hogarth of poets. But this is hardly correct, for he shuns licentious revels. He does not picture vice in the acme of enjoyment, but in the agonies of its fall. He surrounds himself with nothing but miseries, and never seems

so happy as when he is recounting the griefs of his neighbours. The poet has no philosophical opinions or æsthetic views of any kind. The area of his mind might be covered by the village catechism. It is owing to this lack of comprehensiveness, no less than to the sombre nature of his muse, that Crabbe has long since fallen from the high place he once held among his contemporaries.

It is, I suppose, in consequence of this contracted range of his thoughts, that Crabbe does not flourish in abstract themes, but only in painting objective individualities. When he generalizes, he becomes trite and heavy. But to his portraits he imparts the finished touches and the marvellous shades of Rembrandt. His "Library" and "Newspaper" are two of his most general, and two of his worst, poems. His "Parish Register" is the most individual, and therefore the best of his productions. He even seems incompetent to deal with specific facts, unless such as are actually floating before his eyes. For nearly all his pictures are the result of visual observation. Perhaps, there is no instance of any other poet, who has risen to greatness, with so contracted a sphere for his muse. Nearly all his poems are so many different photographs of the same subject. His "Parish Register" is only a prolongation of his "Village." His "Borough" is a still further expansion of the same subject. They both consist of masterly analyses of character and delineations of social life, in its most prosaic and repulsive aspects. In the "Tales of the Hall," Crabbe is much more discursive; but they are all only so many episodes of provincial life. And even here, his lymphatic constitution predominates. There is a sickly air of melancholy, and sombre tinge of cloistered morality over all his narratives. He seems, even upon amatory subjects, to have felt that his whole strength lay in subduing the soul by pity. The purifying tendencies of this feeling, so present to the Greek mind, doubtless led him to think that, in giving his poems this turn, he was employing the Muses as the moral regenerators of mankind.

In vivid sketches of individual suffering, drawn from the humbler ranks of life, and in exciting sympathy for such suffering among a class too brazened by affluence and custom to be impressed by the sight of it, Crabbe appears to have found his peculiar mission. Out of such materials he contrives to extract more genuine feeling than any other poet. Wordsworth, who closely followed him in this line, certainly did not improve upon his master. The descriptions of Crabbe are more terse, the portraits more life-like, his language more vigorous, his details more striking, and the thorn of sorrow rankles deeper in the heart, when barbed by a man who had himself experienced the miseries which he conveys. In the following description of the heroine of a milliner's shop, as in most of his other portraits, the poet seems not to have been drawing, from his imagination so much as sketching from real life :—

And who that poor, consumptive, wither'd thing,
Who strains her slender throat and strives to sing?
Panting for breath, and forced her voice to drop,
And far unlike the inmate of the shop,
Where she, in youth and health, alert and gay,
Laugh'd off at night the labours of the day ;
With novels, verses, fancy's fertile powers
And sister-converse pass'd the evening hours ;
But Cynthia's soul was soft, her wishes strong,
Her judgment weak, and her conclusions wrong :
The morning call and counter were her dread,
And her contempt the needle and the thread :
But when she read some gentle Juliet's part,
Her woe, her wish, she had it all by heart.

At length the hero of the boards drew nigh,
Who spake of love till sigh re-echoed sigh ;
He told in honey'd words his deathless flame,
And she his own by tender words became ;
Nor ring nor license needed souls so fond,
Alfonso's passion was his Cynthia's bond :
And thus the simple girl, to shame betrayed,
Sinks to the grave forsaken and dismayed.*

* "The Borough Players," Letter xii.

Here the poet produces his results by simply adhering to nature. There is no exaggeration of any kind, no apparent struggle to produce effect. The "Story of Phoebe Dawson" * is still more effective than that of the "Musical Heroine," and the description of the "Miller's Daughter" † is more vigorous than either. "Ruth" ‡ and "Ellen Orford" § belong to the same gallery of portraits ; yet there is a particularity about them which makes them as individual as the rest. The "History of Thomas, the Consumptive Sailor Boy," who comes back from Greenland to die in the arms of Sally, is, as far as the materials of the tale go, trite enough. But in the hands of Crabbe it is invested with more plaintive tenderness than any other similar story in our language. Throughout all this class of subjects, Crabbe shows himself an easy master of those graphic traits and salient touches which make the individual character walk out, as it were, from the framework of the narrative ; and in using such materials for evoking sympathy he rules supreme. But these qualities alone would not place a man very high in the roll of British poets, and had it not been for adventitious circumstances, this poet would never have occupied that position in the eyes of his competitors.

Crabbe was singularly fortunate during his life, in reuniting in his favour the suffrages of the two dispensers of poetical reputation,—Gifford and Jeffrey, who vied with each other in chanting his praises and descanting on his merits. There has been no such union of rival political factions, in setting a poet upon a pedestal, since the days of Addison. Crabbe owed this success not less to the anti-democratic tendencies of his muse than to the solid advantages which the patronage of Burke conferred upon him. It certainly is another proof of the prescient sagacity of Burke's penetrating mind, that when no editor would receive Crabbe's wares, when all the booksellers

* "Parish Register," Marriages.

"Tales of the Hall," b. v.

† *Ibid*, Baptisms.

§ "The Borough," Letter 22.

to a man repudiated his pretensions, when every door was shut against him, Burke recognized his merit, and received the poet into his family, until some provision could enable him to woo the muses without experiencing the fate of an Otway or a Savage. Such was the expansiveness of that great man's heart, that to know Burke was to know the large circle of his acquaintance. By him he was introduced to Johnson, and found himself at the easel of Sir Joshua Reynolds. Thenceforth he shot up like a rocket into the heaven of renown. Booksellers competed for the honour of publishing what a few years before they had scornfully rejected. Fox soothed the hours of sickness by turning over the leaves of the "Parish Register," where he read of miseries deeper than his own. Even the tough heart of Thurlow was taught, by the same work, to melt at the sight of others' woe. He gave the poet a benefice. Sir Walter Scott re-echoed the general acclamation. Even the youthful Byron caught the infection so deeply as to place him in the first rank of existing poets :

This fact in Virtue's name let Crabbe attest ;
Though Nature's sternest painter, yet the best.*

But this general eulogy was too exalted to be sustained. In the next generation Crabbe rapidly declined in favour, and now he is as virtually laid on the shelf as Rogers or Southey himself. But a calm and dispassionate criticism will equally learn to reduce factitious renown to its true value, while it rescues the poet's memory from the injustice of neglect.

No poet in our literature carved out for himself a more special province than Crabbe, and adhered to it with more fidelity. This, perhaps, is one of the best proofs of his original genius. While adhering to the old poetical establishment with respect to his style, with respect to his matter, he resolved to

* "I consider," writes Byron in 1816, "Crabbe and Coleridge as the first of these times in point of power and genius."

follow nature, to discard the hackneyed poetical commonplaces, —to sing of nothing but the natural results of his own experience. Life must be painted as it actually is, and not as it is depicted by a too heated imagination. As his predecessors revelled with buskined nymphs and swains in Idæan valleys or in Olympian groves, he reproduced the outcasts of cellars, the inmates of almshouses, and the victims of depravity, wrestling with misery in the squalid haunts of impoverished towns. No subject was too low for his muse. Every rank and grade of life was ransacked to afford him instances of the miseries and the vices of the class from which he sprung. But these are treated in the elaborate style which the Queen Anne poets applied to a far different kind of subjects. Hence, he has been called Pope in worsted stockings. But this is hardly fair to either poet, for both have distinct peculiarities, which keep them as wide apart as any two poets in our literature. If Crabbe has none of the passion, or sublimity, or recondite thought, or ingenious fancy, he has few of the artificial airs of his master. He rarely substitutes words for thoughts. If his language is polished, it is always terse, manly, unostentatious, — always revealing the matter, never itself. He never attempts to hide prosaic conceptions behind brilliant antitheses. But we rarely get more than the simple picture of the object which Crabbe presents to us, or if the poet helps us to anything out of his own mind, it simply consists of wise saws of prudence, moral hints, and religious admonitions. In this respect he is the most objective poet in any literature.

I must, therefore, set down Crabbe as wanting in all the qualities of first-class poetry. Ideality, passion, constructiveness, invention upon any imposing scale, brilliant fancy,—he has none of these: hence, he rarely attempts any other form of verse except the simple idyll, or any other metre than the pentameter. In extracting pathos out of scenes mainly drawn from humble life, he is unrivaled. Here his strength

lay. He is also hardly less successful in graphic delineation of the provincial life with which he was familiar. Crabbe from a boy was a keen observer of everything which passed under his notice. He has drawn his own portrait in this respect in the adventures of Richard,* the poor lad who daily brought to his widowed mother's home the results of his rambles through the neighbouring fishing village, and also contrived, from the quay and the street, from the mechanic's shop and the smuggler's cave, from the fisher's hut and the tavern fireside, from the screaming gulls and the clashing waves, to extract themes for his muse and principles for his guidance, in after life. In reproducing these varied experiences, and in surrounding them with details which imparted to them life and freshness, no poet could have been more successful than Crabbe ; but here his triumph ends. In describing the lower phases of the actual, he distances all his competitors. But when he comes to warmth of colouring, to passionate imagination, to sublime philosophic invention ; in fine, to any of those qualities which invest the actual with the ideal, here Crabbe touches ground. It is not that he fails in any of these great qualities, so much as he never attempts to exhibit them. Hence Crabbe's stories can never occupy the top rank of idyllic literature, nor entitle their author to more than a respectable place in the middle group of our third-class poets.

* "Tales of the Hall," b. iv.

Browning.

BROWNING is one of those writers who has achieved success by a series of failures. Nothing could hardly have been more unpromising than his first performances. His plays could neither be tolerated on the stage, nor in the closet. His narrative poetry was undecypherable. His lyrics set teeth on edge as effectually as if the sound had forced its jagged way through pipes of scrannel straw. The public stopped its ears. But the poet, doubtless, feeling there was a chink of good metal in his ore, laboured at the literary anvil, until sparks began to gleam, and a glow was struck out which created for him an audience. Twenty years ago Browning was unendurable. Now, it would be hardly too much to say that his popularity as a poet is alone overshadowed by the wider renown of Tennyson. For his later poems have reflected back some portion of their glitter on his earlier pieces, and has raised them, as it were, to be joint partners in their success, like the later offshoots of a family who have rescued the elder branches from the obscurity entailed by their individual demerits. This is the unjust incidence of a law which is fair in its general application. A poet who, like Scott, writes his best things first, whatever may be the amount of his early fame, generally fails to steep in its sunshine his later productions, if these are much below the standard of his previous efforts. But if the worst come first, the majority of readers are too apt to think they have been asleep, and eagerly seize

upon all that they had shut their eyes to before, as food for an intellectual banquet.

Genius, of course, is erratic. It is hazardous to formulate its growth under any general law. But this much may be said, at all events, that the world has never seen an example of first-class poetic genius commencing early and labouring all through that long space of life which the Romans included within the period of youth, without producing anything which may be called great, and then, while the physical powers are on the wane, achieving distinction by works of the highest order of merit. Now, Browning's poetic capacities are just of that class from which we would expect long-enduring struggle, terminating in ever-widening gleams of success, achieved not by any commanding powers of genius, but by deep observation upon men and their ways, by a happy Carlyleism of expression, and a laboured persistence at the file, so as to pack the greatest amount of thought in the briefest compass of words. He has little pathos. His imagination is at zero. He has no deep well of sensibility springing up in himself. His powers are all fed and called into action by external objects, to which he brings to bear shrewd good sense and deep reflection, sharpened by a facetiousness which imparts to his thoughts an Attic flavour. But if we look for the lofty elements of poetry in Browning, that is, for those ingredients which constitute ideality, passion, sympathy, and a grand inventive genius, we shall assuredly look in vain. Browning is too practical, cleaves too much to the outside world to deal in such things. We might as well ask for civet perfume from our fishmonger, or Indian silks at a butcher's shop.

The earlier efforts of Browning's muse were directed to the embodiment of the lives of theorists who had grown up under the influence of a mad craving for knowledge, love, and power. In "*Paracelsus*," we have the Swiss empiric, tracked through the strange divagations of his career, and dramatically avouching his belief in the extravagant professions with which

he astounded the universities of Europe. But even here, the unimaginative nature of the poet is apparent ; for, instead of surrounding his hero with strange adventures, or introducing him to demons exorcised to yield up the secret of other worlds, Browning treats his subject entirely from a psychological point of view, and gives us simply the lofty aspirations of the hero himself, modified by no results unless the failure of his efforts. We view him in Geneva, as well as in Constantinople and Rome, harnessed simply to the common gear of every-day life ; and the reader, after wading through this protracted life-drama of four parts, derives no glimpse beyond the boundary of actual existence. He is, however, refreshed by draughts of inspiration which allure him onward through these barren regions, though the springs are as rare as gushes of water from the rocks of an African wilderness. When Paracelsus is remonstrated with for leaving all the pleasures of home, in pursuit of wild devices and airy imaginings, he replies :—

What should I

Do, kept among you all ? * * * * *

Be sure that God

Ne'er dooms to waste the strength He deigns to impart.

Ask the gier-eagle why she stoops at once

Into the vast and unexplored abyss,

What full-grown power informs her from the first

Why she not marvels, strenuously beating

The silent boundless regions of the sky !

* * * * * *

I go to prove my soul ;

I see my way, as birds their trackless way.

I shall arrive ! What time, what circuit first,

I ask not : but, unless God send his hail,

Or blinding fire-balls, sleet or stifling snow,

In some time, His good time, I shall arrive :

He guides me and the bird.*

These flights, however, are at the expense of history ; for Paracelsus was too reckless a boaster to talk philosophy, and

* Sc. i.

one of his proper names—Bombastus—survives to designate the rant with which he used to drench his contemporaries. But Browning makes him, after the manner of Buckle, formulate the law of progress :—

'Tis in the advance of individual minds
That the slow crowd should ground their expectation
Eventually to follow ; as the sea
Waits ages in its bed, till some one wave
Out of the multitudinous mass, extends
The empire of the whole, some feet, perhaps,
Over the strip of sand which would confine
Its fellows so long time. Thenceforth the rest,
Even to the meanest, hurry in at once,
And so much is clear gained.*

At Constantinople he falls in with Aprile, an Italian poet, as madly in quest of love as Paracelsus is after knowledge, his acquaintance with whose frenzy almost awakens him from his own :—

Love me henceforth, Aprile, while I learn
To love ; and, merciful God, forgive us both !
We wake at length from weary dreams, but both
Have slept in fairyland : tho' dark and drear
Appears the world before us, we no less
Wake with our wrists and ankles jewelled still.
I, too, have sought to know, as thou to love,
Excluding love as thou refusedst knowledge.
Still thou hast beauty and I power. We wake :
What penance canst devise for both of us ?†

Aprile, however, dies, when only his true worth reveals itself to Paracelsus :—

'Tis only when they spring to Heaven that angels
Reveal themselves to you : they sit all day
Beside you, and lie down at night by you,
Who care not for their presence ;—muse or sleep,—
And all at once they leave you, and you know them.‡

* Sc. iii.

† Sc. ii.

‡ Sc. v.

The hero at last is brought to recognise the value of his fellow-creatures, whose shortcomings a too haughty disposition had led him to despise :—

In my own heart, love had not been made wise
 To trace love's faint beginnings in mankind,
 To know even hate is but a mask of love's,
 To see a good in evil, and a hope
 In ill-success. To sympathize, be proud
 Of their half reasons, faint aspirings, dim
 Struggles for half truths, their poor fallacies,
 Their prejudices, fears and cares and doubts,
 Which all touch upon nobleness, despite
 Their error, all tend upwardly, though weak,
 Like plants in mines which never saw the sun,
 But dream of him, and guess where he may be,
 And do their best to climb and get to him:—
 All this I knew and failed.*

He does not expire, however, without a presentiment that his name one day will be in the ascendant :—

If I stoop
 Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud,
 It is but for a time ; I press God's lamp
 Close to my heart ; it's splendour, soon or late,
 Will pierce the gloom. I shall emerge one day !
 You understand me ? †

The lesson taught by Paracelsus is what some of us learn, like himself, too late :—

Let men
 Regard me, and the poet dead long ago,
 Who once loved rashly ; and shape forth a third,
 And better-tempered spirit, warned by both.‡

But these beauties hardly repay the reader for the laborious effort of toiling through a performance in which there is no incident to amuse and little philosophy to instruct him, where the

* Sc. v.

† Sc. v.

‡ Sc. v.

attention constantly flags from want of sustained interest, and the characters excite no curiosity, their actions emerging out of preconceived psychological theories rather than from the well-spring of the human heart.

If "Paracelsus" awakened any expectation of poetic power from Browning, the hope must have been quickly extinguished by the appearance of "Sordello" some five years afterwards, a work which very few people have tried to get through, and out of the handful who have, not one has arrived at the singular felicity of decyphering its meaning. The intention of Browning was to reveal the growth of a poet's mind in the twelfth century, upon Lombard soil, embodying in its formation all the artistic influences rife at the period, along with the effects of those stormy vicissitudes which the Italian republics of the north underwent in upholding their liberties, at one time against the attacks of the Emperor, at another against the encroachments of the Pope. To trace the influence of new ideas upon national or individual character, especially among such a wild race as these Lombard people, not long caught in the Christian net, and displaying in their public monuments as well as in their riotous acts, all the savage instincts of their pagan ancestors, was indeed a task worthy of a great poet. The history of the period, too, crammed full of romance, might have furnished the writer with many an episode full of love and daring exploit, to arouse the most lagging attention, or satisfy the most gluttonous appetite for sensational novelty. But Browning hit upon a mine, which he could not strike his shaft into, and the riches of which he consequently failed to appreciate. He does not appear to have understood that these Lombardic people were, in the twelfth century, in a mere transition state, with a Christian creed united to pagan manners; nor comprehended the necessity of fitting the mind of his hero into the corresponding state of things. Indeed, so far as I can make out, "Sordello" is much more the offspring of the nineteenth century than of the splendid savagery which characterized the people among whom his destiny was

intended to have been moulded. He reveals the features of a refined artist and gentleman growing up among a set of half-civilized barbarians who were constantly knocking each other on the head, when they stood in one other's way, and who seldom patronized art unless as a medium of transmitting their crimes to posterity. This poem, therefore, by the generality of readers, is fairly given up as a puzzle which is scarcely worth the trouble to solve. Between incongruity and unmeaningness there is hardly an inch of ground on which the critic can plant the sole of his foot.

The story of *Sordello* is told in six books ; the first three record his experience as an egoist, comprising the musings of the early part of his life in the castle of Goito, where he was brought up in ignorance of his hereditary claims to the Ghibelline chiefdom, and in lone communings with Nature. The last three are taken up with *Sordello's* experience as an altruist, in the course of which he attempts to conciliate the leaders of the Ghibellines with those of the Guelfs, whom he imagines to have right on their side, and to rule over the rival factions by the gifts of an Apollo-kingship or a sort of natural divine right, which the Italians, it is supposed, on account of their love for the arts, ought to be the first to yield submission to. A lady, of course, figures in the story, with the appropriate name of Palma, of high lineage, who ushers *Sordello* from his place of obscurity into the presence of the great world. *Sordello* and Palma entertain a mutual passion for each other, which is subject to the usual ordeals of rival claimants for the lady's hand ; but, before the lovers can be united, *Sordello* dies, just having discovered that his aspirations to the poet kingship were supported by the more substantial claims of hereditary descent. It would hardly be thought that a theme of this simple character needed such complex treatment as to render it unintelligible to the ordinary reader. But the poet opens the piece with his hero's end, and sets out, therefore, by obliging us to read history backwards. The reader, however, is no sooner bent upon this task

than he finds himself transferred to the commencement of the story, which he plods through very much with the feelings of one introduced into a sphere where neither latitude, or chronology, or syntax have any visible recognition whatever. The mere sensuous intuitions of space and time may, doubtless, have their effect upon the outer development of a poet's life. But Browning's task was to account for the growth of his hero's mind, with whose innate strength they have very little to do. He, therefore, thought himself at liberty to make

Succeeding times shake hands with later,
And that, which was before, come after,

in his efforts to penetrate into the roots of mental phenomena, and reveal the inner shapings of a poet's powers. Hence he starts his story just before Sordello's death-scene, to come round to the same point again ; just as in the recital of Sordello's experience as an egoist and altruist, Browning leaves his hero at the close of each circle very much in the same plight as he found him at setting out. Indeed, so bent is Browning upon revealing the action of psychological laws in the formation of a poet's character, that towards the close of his story he regales us with some twelve pages of his own individual experience of poetic development, in utter defiance of historical unity or of any laws of grammatical construction which govern the speech of men.

It is this love of introspective analysis, this predominance of the mental over the sensuous, of the rational over the emotional nature in Browning, which has paralysed all his efforts to shine as a dramatist. He writes mostly as if his feelings had to work their way through the heavy folds of the intellect. His characters seem formed to display the effect of some psychological law, rather than to trace the growth of passion in peculiar natures, under certain groups of circumstances. It is not that his personages never die of passion, or kill themselves in despair. These catastrophes happen with Browning as often as with other dramatists. The only difference is, that when they occur else-

where, there is always some explicit reason, some prelude outburst of feeling, whereas Browning's characters have the trick of falling dead, or becoming delirious without evincing any emotion or premonitory symptoms whatever. In the "Blot of the 'Scutcheon," Lady Mildred, who is anxiously waiting in her chamber for the midnight visit of her lover, receives from her brother Thorold the news, that he, Thorold, has just slain him beneath her window, almost with the same *sang-froid* as if the speaker had announced truffles for supper :—

Ah ! this speaks for you.
 You've murdered Henry Mertoun ! now proceed !
 What is it I must pardon ? This and all ?
 Well, I do pardon you ;—I think I do.
 Thorold, how very wretched you must be !*

Yet, after an hour of this imperturbable talk, Lady Mildred falls dead, and her too impetuous brother, who acts like a madman, but who is supposed to be the only person in the piece under the influence of reason, follows her example. In like manner, Anael, in the "Return of the Druses," falls dead without any presumable cause, just at the very moment she is wanted ; and Djabal, her lover, slips out of the world, after her, without any emotion, just as if death was only stripping off one's coat, and life could be resumed as easily as putting it on again. In "Luria," the Moor drinks poison, because he has first gained a victory which has saved Florence, and placed his enemies at his feet. And, to make the dénouement more startlingly absurd, a group of people are introduced talking to the dead man, who goes through the agonies of a violent death as calmly as if he were going to sleep. Old King Victor, in the tragedy of that name, also "shuffles off this mortal coil" in the same easy fashion, just as his son is restoring the crown which the old man had come from Chambery to claim. In all these cases, Death steps in at an unseasonable juncture, to tell the actor he is wanted,

* Act iii., sc. ii.

and an unintelligible life is ended by an exit equally unintelligible. Now there may be something in all this beyond our powers of comprehension ; but it cannot be connected with the growth of passion, which constitutes the life-blood of the drama.

It need hardly be stated, that action is the very soul of dramatic life. As the Greek term imports, a drama is something to be performed, not a quality to be illustrated, or a set of speeches to be spoken. Sentiments must be subsidiary to acts, and never allowed to usurp their place. Without the progressive development of human action—one group of facts evolving themselves out of another in natural sequence—there can be no such thing as dramatic representation at all. Each scene must keep the spectator in suspense, while it moves the action one step forward to the final result. But in most of Browning's plays, we get neither backward nor forward, but the action appears to oscillate about a certain fixed centre, that is, the metaphysical stand-point he is desirous to illustrate. Anything, therefore, like vulgar human interest is set at nought. Hence, action lags, and human incident is buried beneath interminable conversations, designed rather to display some peculiar theory of human nature, than to stimulate the fancy or to warm the heart. In "*Luria*," the stand-point appears to be heroic magnanimity. The Moor, after pendulating, through five acts, between destroying his enemies or saving the republic, winds up by destroying himself. In the "*Return of the Druses*," the design of which is to exhibit female disinterestedness, there is no real action till the closing scene, when the incidents of a contorted love and political rebellion are despatched in a few lines, which ought to have been spread over the body of the play. In "*King Victor*" we have hardly any incidents, certainly none capable of awakening the slightest interest, spun out into the form of a five act drama, seemingly for the sake of showing the influence of a masculine woman over an effeminate man. It is evident that plays constructed after this fashion can neither instruct nor amuse, and I am not, therefore, sur-

prised to find that the poet, some quarter of a century ago, came to Hamet Benengeli's resolution of laying down his pen and writing no more compositions of this kind for an unappreciating public.

Mr. Browning, however, being a man of ability, could execute nothing without manifesting some signs of vigour, and accordingly we find scattered up and down his dramas, though at rare intervals, passages of power. Thus, in the "Return of the Druses," Loys de Dreux expresses his love for Anael:—

Your breathing passes through me, changes
My blood to spirit, and my spirit to you,
As heaven the sacrificer's wine to it :—*

And in the same play Djabal very powerfully expresses his determination to slay the tyrant who had shown no mercy to his race :—

The man must die,
As thousands of our race have died thro' him.
One blow, and I discharge his weary soul
From the flesh that pollutes it ;—let him fill
Straight some new expiatory form of earth,
Or sea, the reptile, or some aery thing :—†

And in the "Blot of the 'Scutcheon," the conventional world, so often shocked at the sequel of true love, is thus rebuked by Mertoun,—

Die, Mildred ! leave
Their honourable world to them,—for God
We're good enough, tho' the world casts us out !‡

And in the "Scene in a Balcony," Herbert expresses his passion with electric force, as all the love should be expressed which sheathes itself in the heart :—

Give my love its way:
A man can have but one life and one death,
One heaven, one hell. Let me fulfil my fate :—
Grant me my heaven now. Let me know you mine,

* Act iii.

† Act iii.

‡ Act iii., sc. i.

Prove you mine, write my name upon your brow ;
Hold you, and have you, and then die away,
If God please, with completion in my soul.*

But these flashes of genius are momentary, and only serve to throw out into more startling prominence the desert waste of commonplace by which they are surrounded.

“Colombe’s Birthday” is the only one of Browning’s plays which, I think, posterity will care about preserving, and that not so much for the stage as for the closet. The characters are more natural than in any other of his performances, and the plot, such as it is, begins to develop itself in the first act, and expands with steady progress till it culminates in the end. The language, too, is at once plastic and forcible, occasionally reminding us of the dramatists of the early Stuarts. Valence, a poor advocate of Clives, who believes that the Duchess Colombe is about to jilt him and barter her heart for pelf and power, thus expresses his indignation :—

Oh heaven ! this mockery has been played too oft !
Once to surprise the angels,—twice, that Fiends
Recording might be proud they chose not so—
Thrice many thousand times, to teach the world
All men should pause, misdoubt their strength, since men
Could have such chance, yet fail so signally,
—But ever,—ever—this farewell to heaven,
Welcome to earth—this taking death for life,—
This spurning love and kneeling to the world—
Oh heaven ! it is too often and too old.†

But the great defect of the piece is the meagre conception of this Valence, who is represented as a provincial simpleton, and about the last person with whom a grand lady like Colombe could possibly fall in love. We miss also in the Duchess, not only the display of passion, but the steps which lead up to it ; we get occasionally the sentiment, but we lack the fire and the growth of love. The consequence is that the language, as in

* First Part.

† Act v.

his other plays, seems pitched in the same monotonous key. Everything seems to be reached through the dry abstraction of the intellect rather than the glowing enthusiasm of the heart. Hence, going through one of Browning's plays is travelling through a champaign country, where there is no towering grandeur, no diversified peaks, or richly wooded slopes to relieve the eye, but where the traveller only meets with occasional patches of verdure cultivated on the same stagnant level. Where Browning's plays are not defective from lack of incident or progressive evolution of plot, they fail from unintelligibility of motive, or unnatural situation of character. In "Strafford," which is the most pretentious of his tragedies, the plot moves steadily forward, for this is supplied by history; but the sentiments belie nature, and these are supplied by the poet himself. Strafford was a character, the mainspring of whose motives was towering ambition. To seize upon the highest honours in the state, to clutch an earldom, he abandoned his party and risked his neck. But in the play he is represented as impelled along his daring course by his love for the king—

Him with the mild voice and the mournful eyes.

Of Pym we know very little. But it is hardly likely that the man who hunted Strafford to the scaffold, would be, as Browning represents him; bound to his victim by chivalrous friendship in his early manhood. The closing scene, in which the poet introduces both shaking hands, and looking forward to a renewal of their early affection in another world, is simply an outrage on propriety. Men who have been seeking each other's blood, just at the moment when the desires of one are about to be glutted with the head of his victim, are not so ready to rush into each other's arms and crave instant forgiveness. I do not know if Strafford was ever guilty of the unpardonable folly of making love. At least Browning does not think so, for the only expression of tenderness he has for the unswerving fidelity of Lady Carlisle, escapes him, by addressing her occa-

sionally as Lucy. And the lady expresses her passion for her hero with equal frigidity by calling him "noble Strafford." Hence no feelings but those of weariness are awakened by the performance. The buckram platitudes in which the speakers indulge even destroy those feelings of pity which the story of Strafford is calculated to awaken in the roughest minds. Read the facts as they are narrated in history, and we are moved to tears; but read them in the pages of the dramatist, and we contemplate the tale with indifference. Even when Strafford's children are brought into his prison, we feel no sympathy, simply because the poet has not prepared us for it. The dramatist, here, is in the situation of the actor. Before he can excite compassion in others he must feel it himself. And Browning, doubtless, thinks it unmanly to give unrestrained scope to his emotional nature. He has accordingly spoiled the materials for a very fine tragedy. "Strafford" for some short period, assisted by the superb presence of Macready, kept possession of the British stage, but when he withdrew his sustaining hand, the play soon slipped out of the public notice.

Browning, notwithstanding his dramatic failures, is essentially a realistic poet. His sphere lies in the reproduction of the actual. Out of the charmed circle of English life he rarely treads. Yet he is not a representative poet, in the broad sense of the term; for his characters are too few to embrace any wide section of humanity, and too individual to become the embodiment of the class to which they belong. His sketches are too local and particular in their colouring to be accepted in any lofty sense of generalization. He sticks too closely to fact, to launch out into any views of speculation. He is in poetry what Bacon called himself in physics, the interpreter of nature, the only difference being that the objects to which the poet applies his plummet-line, are not stones and trees, but men and women. And men and women he produces in their fragmentary aspects, just as they are beating out their isolated lives, without any theories, which make

the few, exponents of the destiny of the many. Hence Browning does not dominate his age in any one feature. He does not even affect to charm it into other paths than those along which it seems driven by the blind impulse of necessity. His is not the task to leap Phaeton-like into the chariot of destiny, and guide the sphere of the earth nearer to the sun. He has no theories to propound, patchwork-fashion or otherwise. The enigma of life and death he does not attempt to meddle with. All Browning's aim is to stereotype some phase of actual life, to catch as it were some stirring incident, or some great character in the act of shaping its particular ends, and mould them in his page, that they may stand out like the tablatures on a Greek frieze in startling prominence for ever.

Decidedly the cleverest of these pieces is "Bishop Blougram's Apology," under which title the poet introduces Cardinal Wiseman justifying his own position, as the very best of all positions in the world for him, to one Gigadibs, a literary man, who affects to despise His Eminence as a mere charlatan playing a masked part. Gigadibs, being one of an influential class entertaining similar feelings, has been invited to dinner, in order to give the prelate an opportunity of reasoning him out of his false impressions, and thereby demolishing a host of opponents to his style and dignity. The bishop sets Gigadibs quite at his ease during dessert, just as a dentist places his victim in an easy chair, before he commences the extracting process; nor does Gigadibs get off quite clear until every ante-Blougram prejudice has been plucked out of him by the roots. But this is done by a candid avowal of feelings and convictions by no means creditable to Blougram, who declares himself not an absolute believer, though as perfect a one as the age can afford, and who flatly admits he has clutched the foremost prize of the Church, because he saw the object was within his reach, and that this object gave him, in conjunction with the greatest ease and literary leisure, a station of great eminence in the eyes of

the world. His guest, however, was a literary hack, with no claim to consideration whatever. For extinguish the contributor to *Blackwood*, and what was Gigadibs? Nothing. But Blougram, while he wrote articles, in the *Dublin Review*, on Etrurian art and on the Roman catacombs, was a primate of the Church, on whom the tiara of the Papacy might fall; styled the queen his cousin, and had dukes and duchesses kneeling to kiss his ring every day. Gigadibs would, to his dying hour, regard his invitation to Blougram's table as one of the crowning honours of his life. Contrast such a position with the first Napoleon's or Shakespeare's, and, in a worldly point of view, both were contemptible. All Napoleon's struggles, no sane man would endure for the miserable termination of an Austrian marriage, and the construction of a bran new empire, which was no sooner raised than tumbled down and buried the creator in its ruins. As for the poor bard of Avon, he was always glad to nestle under the protection of people who, had they been alive now, would have felt it an honour to have had Blougram's acquaintance. Gigadibs, who does not deny the cogency of this reasoning, quietly hints his suspicions that Blougram cannot believe in all the theological nonsense he expresses, and that, in such a case, the interior conviction that he is a charlatan, merely playing a part, must interfere with that self-respect without which, for a conscientious man, there is little enjoyment in this world. He, Gigadibs, though socially insignificant, has a self-approving conscience to fall back upon, a feeling of candour underlying honest conviction, which gives him the reputation of manliness with his fellows, and keeps the whiteness of his own mind without a stain. The crowd frequently exclaim, "Blougram is an impostor!" But nobody who knows Gigadibs believes that he is other than what he appears—an honest man. Blougram, however, parries this thrust very successfully, by showing Gigadibs his erroneous notions about faith. Absolute, undisturbed belief in religious dogma in these scientific times is impossible, just as absolute scepticism, undisturbed by religious

gleams, is impossible. Sceptics occasionally are devout, as believers have sometimes their moments of scepticism. Gigadibs is invited to choose between a life of faith diversified by doubt, or a life of doubt diversified by faith. Blougram saw distinctly that the first alternative was the best thing for him, because it led to a bishopric ; whereas Gigadibs had closed with the latter, which leads to nothing. Herewith, Blougram uses an appropriate simile. Two passengers are introduced going a voyage. One takes furniture exactly suited to his cabin's size, and makes his journey as agreeable as possible; the other orders all kinds of movables, sumptuous and luxurious, without any consideration of the miserable six-feet-by-four berth in which he is to be located. The captain is peremptory in excluding lumber which there is no possible means of using, and the voyager is obliged to sail without any suitable provision at all. This is Gigadibs' position. In aiming at being a high-souled magnate he has spent his best years so far in vain. He would be great without stooping to the means by which greatness is won, or, in other words, he has not suited his furniture to the cabin size ; he has not employed those resources within his reach, as Blougram has done, to make external forces work for him, and so lift him into greatness. The consequence is, that while Blougram is an ecclesiastical potentate, whom kings would be proud to shelter, Gigadibs is living unnoticed in a garret, eking out a precarious existence by the patronage of the monthlies. The picture is, doubtless, overcharged. But to anyone acquainted with the real Blougram, who has had opportunities of fathoming the latent motives of the man from his outward acts, and contrasting both with his public career, Browning's picture, combining in a masterly manner his subtle analytical spirit with his worldly aims and grasping pretensions, will always appear a familiar portrait, destined to become as historical as Raphael's "Julius," which shows the fiery temperament of Mars peering through the lineaments of the Christian monk. But this is hardly the triumph of poetry,

so much as of metaphysical skill and acute observation of character.

Browning has attempted to reproduce Andrea del Sarto and Fra Lippo de Lippi, but by no means with the same success as the portrait of the prelate, whom, I do not doubt, he often had the opportunity of meeting at Mr. Sloan's in Florence. The two great Catholic painters he could only know through "Vasari," and what remains of their art in the Tuscan convents and in the Pitti palace. He had, therefore, to work them out through the ideal, and this he has failed to seize. No Protestant artist can enter into the conceptions of Catholic painters, at least so far as to embody their feelings in dramatic soliloquy. Browning began life as an artist, and, doubtless, selected these subjects, because he thought his acquaintance with their art would enable him to introduce them to his readers with some degree of success. In the familiar intimacy with their lower life, in which the poet indulges, he misses the lofty conceptions of the two great Florentine painters—those flaming ideals which tortured them in their beds, and rendered them deaf to the praises and slights of their neighbours. Andrea is represented as eulogising others at the expense of himself, before his faithless wife, who has her gallant at the window, and who cannot, therefore, be supposed to be very much interested in the fact, that her husband succeeds because he never aims higher than his capacity, and that others fail because they have loftier ideals but lower powers of execution. Lippi is introduced prowling about the streets at night in quest of frail virginites, and coming in contact with the watch, to whom he narrates his history. By his own account, he is a mere beast of burden for the monks, who will not allow him to paint anything but their own religious pictures, after their own peculiar models. He must paint flesh only that he may manifest the soul which animates it. There must be no voluptuousness, no portrayal of flesh as the mere embodiment of sensuous beauty. This being the thing the painter

mostly coveted, Lippi found the monks' designs very difficult to realize. In this way Browning fritters away in coarse materialities, the ethereal instincts which lit up the souls of these men, who had no ideas out of the religious branch of their art, and who were never content except in making it the mirror for flashing upon the disc of this dark sphere the supernal glories of the next.

One of the shorter pieces of the same series is the bishop ordering his tomb at St. Praxed's church, a portrait which has been praised by Ruskin, as evincing Browning's great familiarity with the middle ages, and his skill in using this knowledge to vitalize an ecclesiastical dignitary of the renaissance. But here the incongruity of the poet's notion with the Catholic idea is more startlingly manifest. For who can fancy a Roman bishop, retaining his belief, and within prospects of sudden death, talking in this fashion :—

And then how I shall lie through centuries,
And hear the blessed mutter of the mass,
And see God made and eaten all day long,
And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste
Good strong thick stupifying incense-smoke.

If Catholicism has more power at one time than another over its votaries, it is at the hour of death, when all the agencies of terror are put into operation, to absorb all the energies of the expiring soul. Yet it is at this hour that the bishop is represented as dwelling upon the charms of his mistress, the superb abundance of her breast, and her white marbly limbs, to his bastard sons, as a prelude to dividing between them the property he had clutched from the revenues of his see; an act of simony which would not be tolerated at Rome, and which, in any other country, would deprive the ecclesiastic committing it, of the last rites of the Church, including Catholic burial. Had Browning represented this Roman bishop in the flush of health, painted with the beauty of the Greek mythology,

and hungering after the lusts of the flesh; or had he set the prelate before us as a hardened sceptic on his death-bed, treating religion as a mockery, whatever might have been its truthfulness, the picture would have been consistent with itself. But the incongruity lies here, that while he represents the prelate as a devout believer in his own creed, he makes him perform acts in violent antagonism with its dictates; and sends him out of the world executing a deed of no effect in the eye of the pontifical law, beyond consigning his soul to everlasting perdition. If Ruskin vouches for Browning's knowledge of religious mediævalism, who is to vouch for Ruskin's? For it is clear that both critic and poet were writing here upon a subject which they could not appreciate, and which they little understood.

The objectivity of Browning's mind is nowhere so much at discount, as when he attempts to deal with religious convictions, whether past or present, as these arise from subjective elements far beyond his ken; and he lacks the power of tracking to its sources that emotional glow which kindles them into enthusiasm. Hence his own religious views have no philosophical background, and he can give no further account of them than what might be given by the dullest thinker of the age; while his representation of the religious views of others is nothing else than such a caricature of the outward form as outrages their inner spirit and vitality. This subject is treated by Browning in two visions, entitled "Christmas Eve" and "Easter Day," through the first of which we arrive at the stupendous idea that God being a pure spirit ought to be worshipped in simplest fashion; and by the last, at the equally startling result that on judgment-day, men will be condemned to cast in their lot with whatever phantoms they followed in this life, and that none can enter heaven but those whose hearts have been lit up by pure unselfish love. However poetical might be the framework by which such views are inculcated, the views themselves are only patchwork impressions derived from the

blunt instincts of the age modifying religious dogmas until they bring them within the appellation of common-sense Christianity. They are neither profound, recondite, nor original, but very commonplace; and just because they are commonplace, the poet has courted popularity by according to them poetic expression. After "Paracelsus" and "Sordello," something was needed to propitiate the intelligence of the age, and accordingly we find "Christmas Eve" and "Easter Day" arranged sandwich-like between these two productions in the form of a sop to the most popular religious party in England.

Nor is the poetic embellishment of these views so imposing as to make up for their lack of boldness or originality. That of "Easter Day" hardly contains a line I could select as choice. The poet is caught wrestling with himself about doubt, Christ, the difficulty of belief, when lo! he is aroused by the sight of judgment itself, and the blue vault above him rapt in flame, with magazines of sulphur and other engines of combustion, ready to make a bonfire of the earth. Then occurs the conversation between the poet and the voice, which ends in the poet, after selecting in succession the world, nature, and art, throwing in his lot with love, and being very comfortably admitted into heaven. Nothing to my mind than this could be more puerile. But a certain class of critics were in ecstasies. "Here," they exclaimed, "Mr. Browning admits the doctrine of the Incarnation; there, that of posthumous rewards and punishments." After this, there could not be a doubt that he was not only a deep thinker, but a great poet.

In "Christmas Eve," the poetic framework is more artistic in construction, and displays powers of graphic delineation of no common order. The picture of the dissenting chapel and the people assembling for worship, though reminding us too much of the Ingoldsby Legends, appears to have been drawn from personal experience. The poet under the influence of the preaching falls asleep, and after meeting with a lunar rainbow, and fancying he recognises God in nature, is transported

in succession to Rome, where he sees the pompous ceremonies of the Latin Church under the dome of St. Peter's ; and to Göttingen, where he listens to the exposition of a German professor in goggle spectacles, who attempts to prove Christ a mythical embodiment of certain heroic qualities, all very well for humanity to aim at as its ideal, but too perfect ever to have been a living reality. These scenes are sketched with the same attempt at grotesque facetiousness, and terminate in a still more assured impression of their inadequacy to satisfy an immortal mind. The dreamer is then aroused from his lethargy by a thump of the preacher, and he is obliged to acknowledge that worshipping God according to the fashion of these simple folk whom he first scorned, is the most effective way of paying tribute to the divinity. Thus the poet takes us round the world, to show that the simplest form of dissent ought to furnish the most congenial worship to a devout mind, and that religious culture or rational inquiry may very properly be discarded for æsthetic blindness and theological ignorance. Browning, then, can hardly be taken as a deep thinker in religious matters, or the exponent of a lofty spirituality. With him, we get no farther than Jeremiah Bunting's commentaries and Whitefield's doxology. He falls behind the age in his attempt to lead it. He has no solution of the theological puzzle beyond that of the most illiterate of his countrymen. As a poetic seer, therefore, Browning has little claim on our consideration.

"The Ring and the Book," which is regarded as our poet's masterpiece, is a compound of his worst defects and best excellences. Prolixity unendurable ; deserts of waste commonplace ; jagged metre, which seems as if ordinary prose had been cut up at random into lines ten syllables each ; order and natural sequence utterly paralysed in the treatment of the story ;—such are the blotches of the piece, which are, however, frequently relieved by arch humour, pungent description half ludicrous and half pathetic, life-like crayoning of character, where the mind's

features, at all events, are sculptured with the minuteness of a photograph, along with dashing sketches of melo-dramatic situations, where the actors are skilfully grouped, and their feelings forcibly delineated. But of passion in its quieter depths, of human nature in its higher and unspasmodic moods, we get no glimpse whatever. The tale itself is ghastly, and the characters more fit for some walhalla, or itinerant Chamber of Horrors, than for a story aspiring to a permanent niche in English literature. Such a niche I feel certain in their present form they will not receive. But could the tale, as it easily might, by the mere withdrawal of its prosaic parts, be compressed within one-fourth of its present bulk, and disentangled from its present confused skein of narrative, it might hold its own against any poetic novel of a similar class, as a work of permanent interest.

The simple outlines of the story which Browning takes up four volumes to narrate, may be disposed of almost in as many sentences. Count Guido Franceschini, a meagre noble on the wrong side of forty-five, attached to the fortunes of a cardinal at Rome, seeks to relieve his shattered estate by an advantageous marriage, and retire into the country. Pietro and Violante, an elderly couple in the Count's neighbourhood, have a foster child, Pompilia, the offspring of a bawd, and surreptitiously introduced to the world as their own, in order to save a small life estate, which would otherwise lapse into the hands of strangers. The youth of Pompilia, being only thirteen, her beauty, the possession of an unencumbered property, was the bait at which the Count snapped ; but the crafty pair who landed him, were hoodwinked in return ; for they found the Count had nothing but his title, and that instead of a munificent provision for themselves and Pompilia at his house at Arezzo, they got nothing but starvation fare, meagre soup, contumelious treatment, and stale candle ends. An explosion under these circumstances naturally takes place. Pietro and Violante, leaving their lamb to be kicked about at the will and pleasure of her husband, fly back to Rome, where, in order to spite the

Count, they turn the presumed dowry of Pompilia into smoke, by circulating the rumour that his wife was no child of theirs, but the chance offspring of prostitution. The arrival of this news at Arezzo only subjects Pompilia to worse treatment, which at length becomes so intolerable that she also escapes at night-fall, under the protection of a priest, Caponsacchi, and, in company with her confidante, makes the best of her way to Rome. The pair are overtaken at the last stage of the journey by the husband, who surprises the wife asleep in an inn, with Caponsacchi in lay clothes standing guard outside, and gives the two in charge to a commissary of police, which leads to the trial of the accused before a tribunal in Rome. Pompilia is sent to a convent of the Convertites, a few miles from the villa of Pietro and Violante, and the Canon, Caponsacchi, to exile at Civita Vecchia, some forty miles from the same spot. Pompilia, however, being advanced in pregnancy, is allowed to return in a few months to the house of her foster parents, where she is delivered of a son. The Count, in his country house at Arezzo, some hundred miles distant, not liking the posture of affairs, and imagining a *liaison* still carried on between Pompilia and Caponsacchi at the house of Pietro and Violante, stimulates four of his workpeople to aid him in a murderous attack upon the parties, which is made in the dead hour of the night, on Christmas eve. Pietro had hardly returned to his house from the usual midnight mass, when a tap was heard at the door, from the bravos outside, who used Caponsacchi's name to effect an entrance. They found inside three of the principal actors, the elderly couple, Pietro and Violante, whom they slew on the spot, and Pompilia, whom they thought they had despatched, but whom they left with a six-clear-days' lease of life. Thus, by a special disposition of providence, Pompilia was enabled by a death-bed deposition to vindicate her own innocence and that of Caponsacchi, and insure the conviction of the assassins, who were brought to trial immediately after the murder, and were, after appeal to the Pope, condemned,—the Count to decapitation,

and his accomplices to the gallows. Such is a succinct draught of the story which Browning takes up nearly twenty thousand lines to make palpable to the comprehension of his readers. The "Excursion" is a lengthy poem, but it only takes up one-fourth of the space, and the fate of four dozen distinct personages is exhibited in it. Besides, the poet has given us his theories of morals, of religion, and of nature, in connection with his characters, and, in fact, only puts these forward as the vehicle for the representation of such theories. But Browning deals with no theories of any kind, and strictly confines himself to the story, the simple telling of which constitutes the pith and marrow of four portly octavo volumes. This is leaving the prolixity of the mere novel writer far behind. The great advantage which poetry possesses over prose consists in condensation—in saying a great deal in a very little compass. But Browning seems to think that the peculiar merit of poetry is in saying a very little in a very great compass.

How so simple a story could be spun out to such an enormous extent might perplex ingenuous readers, who, perhaps, may not be aware that a tale can be told three or four times over, each recital being made from a different stand-point, and revealing some new phase of the case imperfectly developed before. First, we have the story extracted out of the Roman archives, and the way in which the poet intends to deal with it, submitted to the consideration of the British public. Then we get the vulgar gossip of Rome about it, split into two portions, according as folks espouse one side or the other. But this is not sufficient for Browning, who gives his readers a third version of the story, according to

What the superior social section,

or the aristocracy of Rome, think about it:—

In person of some man of quality,
Who, breathing musk from lace-work and brocade,

His solitaire amid the flow of frill,
Powdered peruke on nose, and bag at back,
And cane dependent from the ruffled wrist,—
Harangues in silvery and selectest phrase
'Neath wax-lights in a glorified saloon,
Where mirrors multiply the girandole :
Courting the approbation of no mob
But Eminence This and All Illustrious That,
Who take snuff softly, range in well-bred ring,
Card-table-quitters for observance sake,
Around the argument, the rational word —
Still, spite its weight and worth, a sample speech,
How quality dissertated on the case.*

Next, we have the Count's defence of himself at the trial, followed by that of Caponsacchi and Pompilia,—whose depositions are read—on the other side. After the principals come their advocates, Dominus Hyacinthus d'Archangelis for the Count, and pious Doctor Bottinius for the lady. For a poet is not supposed to know, that the prisoner's mouth, when he has an advocate, is hermetically sealed. But, in order to swell out the book, the Count is not only permitted to speak through Hyacinthus, but to make a second elaborate speech in his own defence. After the appeal to the Pope, Innocent XII., has collapsed,—who also favours the reader at great length with his view of this bloody piece of business—the whole is wound up with the execution and the last dying words of the assassins, the sermon preached upon the occasion by a certain notable friar, who took for his text, "God is truth, and every man a liar," and the annotations and reflections of Dominus Hyacinthus and Bottinius upon their management of the prosecution and defence, and upon the sequel of the entire business. The poet then sings his pœan, and retires with the air of a man who has established his reputation. But as the poet has taken such liberties with the time of his readers, it is to be feared that Time in the abstract will take corresponding liberties with him. Performances which

* Vol. i., p. 49.

take up so much visual space in bulk have little chance of occupying permanent space in the eyes of posterity. It is very desirable for a poet to absorb his facts in immensity, but when he fills immensity with his facts that is quite another thing.

The prolixity of Browning in modelling the general features of the story strangely contrasts with the compression of thought he displays in particular parts of it. Indeed, in some of his descriptions, the ideas are so melted down to realize the most compact solidity of expression, that we are reminded of the force our language exhibited when it sprang into life, Minerva-like, armed and accoutred, from the brain of the Elizabethan dramatists. Thus, in the fewest possible words, Guido and his accomplices are conjured up before us as they entered upon their work of assassination :—

It was eve,
The second of the year, and oh so cold !
Ever and anon there flittered through the air
A snow-flake, and a scanty couch of snow
Crusted the grass-walk and the garden-mould.
All was grave, silent, sinister,—when, ah ?
Glimmeringly did a pack of were-wolves pad
The snow, those flames were Guido's eyes in front,
And all five found and footed it, the track,
To where a threshold-streak of warmth and light
Betrayed the villa door with life inside ;
While an inch outside were those blood-bright eyes
And black lips wrinkling o'er the flash of teeth,
And tongues that lolled—oh God, that madest man !
They parleyed in their language. Then one whined—
That was the policy and master-stroke—
Deep in his throat whispered what seemed a name—
“Open to Caponsacchi,” Guido cried,
“Gabriel !” cried Lucifer at Eden's gate.
Wide as a heart, opened the door at once,
Showing the joyous couple and their child,
The two weeks' mother, to the wolves, the wolves
To them.*

* “The Ring and the Book,” vol. i., p. 32.

And, again, according to the aristocratic way of looking at it:—

The five proceed in a body, reach the place—
Pietro's by the Paolina, silent, lone,
And stupefied by the propitious snow,—
At one in the evening : knock : a voice, "Who's there?"
"Friends with a letter from the priest your friend."
At the door straight smiles old Violante's self.
She falls ; her son-in-law stabs through and through.
Reaches thro' her at Pietro ;—"With your son
"This is the way to settle suits, good sire."

* * * * *

He presently got his portion and lay still.
And last, Pompilia rushes here and there,
Like a dove among lightnings in her brake,
Falls also.*

The vulgar who espouse the part of the Count give their view even in more forcible language:—

"Giuseppe Caponsacchi," Guido cried,
And open flew the door : enough again.
Vengeance, you know, burst like a mountain-wave
That holds a monster in it, over the house,
And wiped its filthy four walls free again,
With a wash of hell-fire,—father, mother, wife,
Killed them all, bathed his name clean in their blood.†

Pompilia is made to state her own feelings on the occasion with all the fervour of passion:—

It was the name of him I sprang to meet,
When came the knock, the summons, and the end.
"My great heart, my strong hand are back again,"
I would have sprung to these, beckoning across
Murder and Hell, gigantic and distinct,
O, the threshold posted to exclude me heaven.‡

* "Tertiam Quid," vol. ii., p. 60. † "Half Rome," vol. i., p. 149.

‡ "Pompilia," vol. iii., p. 87.

The feelings of Pompilia when dying and reviewing her brief life, strike across all this harsh dissonance like a strain of mournful music, drenching us with pathos :—

One cannot judge
Of what has been the ill or well of life
The day that one is dying,—sorrows change
Into not altogether sorrow-like ;
I do see strangeness but scarce misery
Now it is over, and no danger more.
My child is safe ; there seems not so much pain.
It comes, most like, that I am just absolved,
Purged of the past, the foul in me washed fair ;
One cannot both have and not have, you know,
Being right now, I am happy, and colour things.
Yes, everybody that leaves life sees all
Softened and bettered : so with other sights :
To me at least was never evening yet
But seemed far beautifuller than its day.
For past is past.*

Pompilia's last thoughts are very naturally directed to the future of her infant son, whom she supposes, when grown up to man's estate, to be curious as to his mother :—

And if he asks "what was my mother like ?"
People may answer "like girls of seventeen."
And how can he but think of this and that,
Lucias, Marias, Sofias, who titter or blush
When he regards them as such boys may do ?
Therefore I wish some one will please to say,
I looked already old, though I was young ;
Do I not—say if you are by to speak—
Look nearer twenty ? No more like, at least,
Girls who look arch or redden when boys laugh
Than the poor virgin that I used to know
At our street-corner in a lonely niche,—
The babe that sat upon her knees, broke off,—
Thin white-glazed clay, you pitied her the more :
She, not the gay ones, always got my rose.†

* "Pompilia," vol. iii., p. 17.

† *Ibid*, p. 4.

There is also something very sad in the touching simplicity with which the circumstances are alluded to which determined the choice of Pompilia's son's name. She herself had received five names at her christening, Francesca, Camilla, Vittoria, Angelica, Pompilia. But these had been of little use to her. Her son will grow up without knowing who his father or mother was, besides having

As good too as no family, no name,
Not even poor old Pietro's name, nor hers,
Poor kind unwise Violante, since it seems
They must not be my parents any more.
That is why something put it in my head
To call the boy "Gaetano,"—no old name,
For sorrow's sake ; I looked up to the sky
And took a new saint to begin anew ;
One who has only been made saint—how long ?
Twenty-five years : so, carefuller, perhaps,
To guard a name-sake than those old saints grow,
Tired out by this time,—see my own five saints !*

Pompilia is drawn with a character of child-like simplicity, which she preserves to the end, and which fully entitles her to a distinct niche among feminine poetic creation :—

All the seventeen years,
Not once did a suspicion visit me,
How very different a lot is mine
From any other woman's in the world.
The reason must be, 'twas by step and step
It got to grow so terrible and strange :
Then strange woes stole on tiptoe, as it were,
Into my neighbourhood and privacy,
Sat down where I sat, laid them where I lay ;
And I was found familiarized with fear
When friends broke in, held up a torch and cried—
" Why, you, Pompilia, in the cavern thus !
" How comes that arm of yours about a wolf?
" And the soft length,—lies in and out your feet,
" And laps you round the knee,—a snake it is."†

* "Pompilia," vol. iii., p. 6.

† *Ibid.*

But all Pompilia's goodness must have sprung from nature, or her five guardian saints must have taken particular care that she should extract nothing but virtue out of the poisonous ground in which she had taken root ; for her putative mother, Violante, was one of the most crafty of her sex, and her natural mother one of the drabs of Rome. The history of a life is struck off in a few words, as introductory to the bargain which consigns the infant to Violante. The real mother was

One of those women that abound in Rome,
Whose needs oblige them eke out one pure trade
By another vile one : Her ostensible work
Was washing clothes, out in the open air,
At the cistern by Citorio ; but true trade—
Whispering to idlers, when they stopped and praised
The ancles she let liberally shine
In kneeling at the slab by the fountain side,
That there was plenty more to criticise
At home, that eve, i' the house where candle blinked
Decorously above, and all was done
I' the holy fear of God, and cheap beside.
Violante now, had seen this woman wash,
Noticed and envied her propitious shape,
Tracked her home to her house-top, noted too,
And now was come to tempt her, and propose
A bargain far more shameful than the first
Which trafficked her virginity away
For a melon and three pauls, at twelve years old.
Five minutes' talk with this poor child of Eve,
Struck was the bargain, business at an end—
“ Then, six months hence, that person whom you trust,
“ Comes, fetches whatsoever babe it be ;
“ I keep the price and secret, you the babe,
“ Paying beside for mass to make all straight.”*

But Violante's stratagems did not stop with defrauding, by means of this putative daughter, the heirs of the estate; she must go further—

* “ Giuseppe Caponsacchi,” vol. ii., p. 8.

She who had caught one fish, could make that catch
A bigger still, in angler's policy.
So with an angler's mercy for the bait
Her minnow was set wriggling on its barb
And tossed to the mid-stream ; that is, this grown girl
With the great eyes and bounty of black hair,
And first crisp youth that tempts a jaded taste,
Was whisked i' the way of a certain man, who snapped.*

This of course was

Count Guido Franceschini, the Aretine,
Descended of an ancient house, though poor,
A beak-nosed, bushy-bearded, black-haired lord,
Lean, pallid, low of stature, yet robust.†

The two parties, after the marriage, went to live in the Count's house at Arezzo, and make each other happy. The explosive indignation of the elderly couple on discovering the wealth and style of the man they had thus entrapped was mere smoke in the air, is not without a spice of humour, arising rather out of the raciness of the description than the intention of the author, who in his picture is strictly true to nature :—

The first week,
And fancy strikes fact and explodes in full.
“ This,” shrieked the Comparini, “ this the Count,
“ The palace, the signorial privilege,
“ The pomp and pageantry were promised us ?
“ For this have we exchanged our liberty,
“ Our competence, our darling of a child ?
“ To house as spectres in a sepulchre
“ Under this black stone heap, the street's disgrace,
“ Grimmiest as that is of the gruesome town,
“ And here pick garbage on a pewter plate,
“ Or cough at verjuice dripped from earthenware ?
“ Oh, via Vittoria! oh the other place
“ I' the Pauline, did we give you up for this ?
“ Where's the foregone housekeeping, good and gay,

* “ Half Rome,” vol. i., p. 89.

† Vol. i., p. 41.

“The neighbourliness, the companionship,
“The treat and feast when holydays came round,
“The daily feast that seemed no treat at all,
“Called common by the uncommon fools we were?
“Even the sun that used to shine at Rome,
“Where is it? Robbed, and starved, and frozen too.
“We will have justice, justice if there be!”
Did not they shout, did not the town resound?
Guido’s old lady-mother Beatrice,
Who since her husband, Count Tommaso’s death,
Had held sole sway i’ the house—the doited crone,
Slow to acknowledge, curtsey, and abdicate,—
Was recognised of true novercal type,
Dragon and devil. His brother Girolamo
Came next in order: priest was he? The worse!
No way of winning him to leave his mumps
And help the laugh against old ancestry
And formal habits long since out of date,
Letting his youth be patterned on the mode
Approved of where Violante laid down law.
Or did he brighten up by way of change?
Dispose himself for affability?
The malapert, too complaisant by half
To the alarmed young novice of a bride!
Let him go buzz, betake himself elsewhere,
Nor singe his fly-wings in the candle-flame!

Four months’ probation of this purgatory,
Dog-snap and cat-claw, curse and counterblast,
The devil’s self had been sick of his own din;
And Pietro, after trumpeting huge wrongs
At church and market-place, pillar and post,
Square’s corner, street’s end, now the palace-step,
And now the wine-house bench—while, on her side,
Violante up and down was voluble
In whatsoever pair of ears would perk,
From goody, gossip, cater-cousin and sib,
Curious to peep at the inside of things,
And catch in the act pretentious poverty
At its wits’ end to keep appearance up,
Make both ends meet;—nothing the vulgar loves
Like what this couple pitched them right and left;—

Then their worst done that way, they struck tent, marched ;—
Renounced their share o' the bargain, flung what dues
Guido was bound to pay in Guido's face,
Left their heart's-darling, treasure of the Twain,
And so forth, the poor inexperienced bride,
To her own devices, bade Arezzo rot,
And the life Signorial, and sought Rome once more.*

The Count, however, has his version of the bargain, and thinks he was the dupe, not them ; for they obtained his rank and state, he nothing but the child of a common strumpet to wife :—

If what I gave in barter, style and state,
And all that hangs to Franceschinihood
Were worthless,—why, society goes to ground,
Its rules are idiot's rambling. Honour of birth,—
If that thing has no value, cannot buy
Something with value of another sort,
You've no reward nor punishment to give
I' the giving or the taking honour. Straight
Your solid fabric, pinnacle to base,
Comes down a-clatter like a house of cards.†

The proper way of looking at the transaction was that both hoodwinked the other, and got well served out for their pains. The matrimonial market may find its general features imaged in the following statement of a special case :—

Which bird o' the brace
Decoyed the other into clap-net? Who
Was fool, who knave? neither, and both, perchance.
There was a bargain mentally proposed
On each side, straight, and plain, and fair enough ;
Mind knew its own mind : but when mind must speak,
The bargain have expression in plain terms,
There was the blunder incident to words,
And in the clumsy process, fair turned foul.

* "Half Rome," vol. i., p. 99.

† "Count Guido Franceschini," vol. ii., p. 91.

The straight backbone-thought of the crooked speech,
 Were just. "I, Guido, truck my name and rank
 "For so much money, and youth, and female charms ;"
 "We, Pietro and Violante, give our child
 "And wealth to you for a rise i' the world thereby."
 Such naked truth, while chambered in the brain,
 Shocks no wise : walk it forth by way of tongue,—
 Out on the cynical unseemliness !
 Hence was the need, on either side, of a lie
 To serve as decent wrappage ; so Guido gives
 Money for money,—and they, bride for groom,
 Having, he, not a doit, they, not a child
 Honestly theirs, but this poor waif and stray.
 According to the words, each cheated each ;
 But in the inexpressive barter of thoughts,
 Each did give and did take the thing designed,
 The rank on this side, and the cash on that,—
 Attained the object of the traffic ; so
 The way o' the world, the daily bargain struck
 In the first market !

* * * * *

Why, you know where the gist is of the Exchange :
 Each sees a profit, throws the fine words in.
 Don't be too hard o' the pair ! Had each pretence
 Been simultaneously discovered, stripped
 From off the body o' the transaction, just
 * * * * * balance had been kept.
 No party blamed the other, so, starting fair,
 All subsequent fence of wrong returned by wrong,
 I' the matrimonial thrust and parry, at least,
 Had followed on equal terms. But, as it chanced,
 One party had the advantage, saw the cheat
 Of the other first, and kept its own concealed :
 And the luck o' the first discovery fell, beside,
 To the least adroit and self-possessed o' the pair.
 'Twas foolish Pietro and his wife saw first
 The nobleman was penniless, and screamed,
 "We are cheated !"*

The account Pompilia gives of her marriage is terrible in its

* "Tertiam Quid," vol. ii., p. 23.

simplicity, graphic in its individual details, and general in its application :—

“I know that when Violante told me first
 The cavalier,—she meant to bring next morn,
 Whom I must also let take, kiss my hand,—
 Would be at San Lorenzo the same eve,
 And marry me,—which over, we should go
 Home, both of us, without him, as before ;
 And till she bade speak, I must hold my tongue,
 Such being the correct way with girl-brides,
 From whom one word would make a father blush ;—
 I know, I say, that when she told me this,
 —Well, I no more saw sense in what she said
 Than a lamb does in people clipping wool ;
 Only lay down and let myself be clipped.
 And when next day the cavalier, who came,
 * * * proved Guido Franceschini,—old,
 And nothing like so tall as I myself,
 Hook-nosed, and yellow in a bush of beard,
 Much like a thing I saw on a boy’s wrist,
 He called an owl, and used for catching birds ;—
 And when he took my hand and made a smile,—
 Why, the uncomfortableness of it all
 Seemed hardly more important in the case
 Than,—when one gives you, say, a coin to spend,—
 Its newness, or its oldness ; if the piece
 Weigh properly, and buy you what you wish,
 No matter whether you get grime or glare !
 Men take the coin, return you grapes and figs.
 Here marriage was the coin, a dirty piece
 Would purchase me the praise of those I loved :
 About what else should I concern myself ? ”*

The portrait of Pompilia herself is also sketched with a minute particularity, as if the artist-poet was executing a drawing from life in mezzotinto :—

Her brow had not the right line, leaned too much,
 Painters would say ; they like the straight-up Greek :

* “Pompilia,” vol. iii., p. 19.

This seemed bent somewhat with an invisible crown
 Of martyr and saint, not such as art approves.
 And how the dark orbs dwelt deep underneath,
 Looked out of such a sad sweet heaven on me ;—
 The lips compressed a little, came forward too,
 Careful for a whole world of sin and pain.*

She is also represented as possessing a soul as perfect as her body, in language which makes the portrait a heirloom of the heart :—

A faultless nature in a flawless form.
 * * * Oh turn aside, nor dare the blaze
 Of such a crown, such constellations, say,
 As jewels base thy front, humanity !
 First, infancy pellucid as a pearl,
 Then childhood—stone which dew-drop at the first
 (An old conjecture) swells by dint of gaze,
 Blue from the sky, and turns to sapphire so :
 Yet both these gems eclipsed by last, and best,
 Womanhood, and wifehood opaline,
 With here and there a tint and hint of flame—
 Desire—the lapidary loves to find.

The purity of Pompilia is well brought out by Caponsacchi, who, as a priest in the habit of celebrating mass and communicating daily, is thus made to associate the influence which she exercised over him with his sacred functions :—

The glory, I say,
 And the beauty, I say, and splendour still say I,
 Who, a priest, trained to live my whole life long
 On beauty and splendour, solely at their source,
 God,—have thus recognized my food in one,
 You tell me, is fast dying while we talk,
 Pompilia.

* * * * *
 The snow-white soul that angels fear to take
 Untenderly.†

* "Giuseppe Caponsacchi," vol. ii., p. 246.

† *Ibid*, p. 166.

Up to the time of meeting with Pompilia all Caponsacchi's thoughts were commonplace, but when he came under her influence

Into another state, under new rule,
I knew myself was passing swift and sure,
Whereof the initiatory pang approached,
Felicitous annoy, as bitter-sweet
As when the virgin-band, the victors chaste,
Feel at the end the earthly garments drop,
And rise with something of a rosy shame
Into immortal nakedness : so I
Lay, and let come the proper throe would thrill
Into the ecstasy and out-throb pain.*

And again,—

That night and next day did her gaze endure,
Burnt to my brain, as sunbeam thro' shut eyes.†

But, notwithstanding this love, Caponsacchi avers :—

I never touched her with my finger-tip,
Except to carry her to the couch, that eve,
Against my heart, beneath my head, bowed low,
As we priests carry the paten.‡

But Pompilia, though weak and compassionate in suffering, is vividly introduced to us as transformed into a tigress, when overtaken by the Count on her last stage to Rome, whither she was fleeing with Caponsacchi. On this occasion, the commissary, with his officers, having secured the priest, in company with the Count, burst into the chamber where Pompilia slept :—

She woke, saw, sprang upright
I' the midst, and stood as terrible as truth,

* "Giuseppe Caponsacchi," vol. ii., p. 202.

† *Ibid*, p. 180.

‡ *Ibid*, p. 231.

The "paten" is the plate upon which the host is laid at mass.

Sprang to her husband's side, caught at the sword
 That hung there useless, since they held each hand
 O' the lover, had disarmed him properly,
 And in a moment out flew the bright thing
 Full in the face of Guido,—but for help
 O' the guards who held her back and pinioned her
 With pains enough, she had finished you my tale
 With a flourish of red all round it, pinked her man
 Prettily ; but she fought them one to six.
 They stopped that,—but her tongue continued free :
 She spat forth such invective at her spouse,
 O'er-frothed him with such foam of murderer,
 Thief, pander, that the popular tide soon turned,—
 The favour of the very Sbirri, straight
 Ebbd from the husband, set towards his wife ;
 People cried "hands off, pay a priest respect,"
 And "persecuting fiend !" and "martyred saint !"
 Began to pass from lip to lip.*

The following is the very graphic account which Pompilia is made to give of the same transaction :—

Then something like a white wave o' the sea
 Broke o'er my brain and buried me in sleep
 Blessedly, till it ebbd and left me loose,
 And where was I found but on a strange bed,
 In a strange room like hell, roaring with noise,
 Ruddy with flame, and filled with men, in front
 Whom but the man you call my husband, ay—
 Count Guido once more between heaven and me,
 For there my heaven stood, my salvation, yes—
 That Caponsacchi, all my heaven of help,
 Helpless himself, held prisoner in the hands
 Of men who looked up in my husband's face
 To take the fate thence he should signify,
 Just as the way was at Arezzo : then,
 Not for my sake, but his who had helped me,—
 I sprang up, reached him with one bound, and seized
 The sword o' the felon, trembling at his side,

* "Half Rome," vol. i., p. 128.

Fit creature of a coward, unsheathed the thing,
And would have pinned him through the poison-bag
To the wall, and left him there to palpitate,
As you serve scorpions, but men interposed—
Disarmed me, gave his life to him again
That he might take mine and the other lives,
And he has done so.*

Caponsacchi gives a very graphic description of the same scene, which of its kind may fairly match with anything of the kind in our literature :—

“ Let myself lead the way—
“ Ere you arrest me, who am somebody,
“ And, as you hear, a priest and privileged,—
“ To the lady’s chamber. I presume you—men
“ Expert, instructed how to find out truth,
“ Familiar with the guise of guilt. Detect
“ Guilt on her face when it meets mine, then judge
“ Between us and the mad dog howling there ! ”
Up we all went together, in they broke
O’ the chamber, late my chapel. There she lay,
Composed as when I laid her, that last eve
O’ the couch, still, breathless, motionless, sleep’s self,
Wax-white, seraphic, saturate with the sun
O’ the morning that now flooded from the front,
And filled the window with a light like blood.
“ Behold the prisoner, the adulteress.”
“ And feigning sleep too ! seize, bind ! ” Guido hissed.

She started up, stood erect, face to face
With the husband : back he fell, was buttressed there
By the window all a-flame with morning red,
He the black figure, the opprobrious blur
Against all peace and joy, and light and life.
“ Away from between me and hell ! ” she cried,
“ Hell for me, no embracing any more !
“ I am God’s ; I love God, God—whose knees I clasp,
“ Whose utterly most just award I take,
“ But fear no more love-making devils : hence ! ”

* “ The other Half Rome,” vol. i., p. 216.

I may have made an effort to reach her side
 From where I stood i' the doorway,—any how,
 I found the arms, I wanted, pinioned fast,
 Was powerless in the clutch to left and right
 O' the rabble pouring in, rascality
 Enlisted, rampant on the side of hearth
 Home and the husband,—pay in prospect too !
 They heaped themselves upon me.—“Ah, and him
 “Also you outrage ? Him, too, my sole friend,
 “Guardian, and saviour ? That I baulk you of,
 “Since,—see how God can help at last and worst.”
 She sprung at the sword that hung beside him, seized,
 Drew, brandished it, the sunrise burned for joy
 O' the blade ; “Die,” cried she, “devil in God's name ! ”
 Ah ! but they all closed round her twelve to one,
 —The unmanly men, no woman-mother made,
 Spawned somehow ! Death-white and disarmed she lay.
 No matter for the sword, her word sufficed
 To spike the coward through and through. He shook,
 Could only spit between his teeth.*

Caponsacchi would have made short work of Guido, had the husband not avoided his gripe, at a respectable distance :—

During this speech of that man,—well, I stood
 Away, as he managed,—still, I stood as near
 The throat of him,—with these two hands, my own,
 As now I stand near yours, sir,—one quick spring,
 One great, good, satisfying gripe, and lo !
 There had he lain abolished with his lie,
 Creation purged o' the miscreate, man redeemed
 A spittle wiped off from the face of God ! †

How Pompilia escaped from Arezzo is detailed with characteristic minuteness :—

And on a certain April evening, late
 I' the month, this girl of sixteen, bride and wife
 Three years and over,—she who hitherto
 Had never taken twenty steps in Rome
 Beyond the church, pinned to her mother's gown,

* “Giuseppe Caponsacchi,” vol. ii., p. 226.

† *Ibid*, p. 225.

Nor, in Arezzo, knew her way through street,
 Except what led to the Archbishop's door,—
 Such an one rose up in the dark, laid hand
 On what came first, clothes and a trinket or two,
 Belongings of her own in the old day,—
 Stole from the side o' the sleeping spouse—who knows?
 Sleeping perhaps, silent for certain,—slid
 Ghost-like from great dark room to great dark room,
 In through the tapestries and out again
 And onward, unembarrassed as a fate,
 Descended staircase, gained last door of all,
 Sent it wide open at first push of palm,
 And there stood, first time, last and only time,
 At liberty, alone in the open street,—
 Unquestioned, unmolested found herself
 At the city gate, by Caponsacchi's side,
 Hope there, joy there, life and all good again,
 The carriage there, the convoy there, light there
 Broadening into a full blaze at Rome,
 And breaking small what long miles lay between ;
 Up she sprang, in he followed, they were safe !*

The particulars of the flight are narrated by Caponsacchi, who makes the reader acquainted with every feature of the journey. Nothing could be more life-like or artistic than his account of the undertaking, which was attended with peril, as Rome was some two hundred miles distant from the Ogre's den at Arezzo :—

At eve we heard the angelus : she turned—
 "I told you I can neither read nor write.
 "My life stopped with the play-time ; I will learn,
 "If I begin to live again. But you—
 "Who are a priest—wherefore do you not read
 "The service at this hour ? Read Gabriel's song,
 "The lesson, and then read the little prayer
 "To Raphael, proper for us travellers."
 I did not like that, neither, but I read.

When we stopped at Foligno it was dark.

* "The other Half Rome," vol. i., p. 212.

The people of the post came out with lights :
 The driver said,—“This time to-morrow, may
 “Saints only help, relays continue good,
 “Nor robbers hinder, we arrive at Rome.”
 I urged, “Why tax your strength a second night ?
 “Trust me ; alight here and take brief repose !
 “We are out of harm’s reach, past pursuit : go, sleep,
 “If but an hour ! I keep watch, guard the while
 “Here in the door-way.” But her whole face changed,
 The misery grew again about her mouth,
 The eyes burned up from faintness, like the fawn’s
 Tired to death in the thicket, when she feels
 The probing spear o’ the huntsman. “Oh, no stay,”
 She cried, in the fawn’s cry, “on to Rome, on,—
 “Unless ’tis you who fear—which cannot be.”

We did go on all night ; but at its close
 She was troubled, restless, moaned low, talked at whiles
 To herself, her brow on quiver with the dream :
 Once, wide awake, she menaced, at arms’ length,—
 Waved away something :—“Never again with you,
 “My soul is mine, my body is my soul’s ;
 “You and I are divided evermore
 “In soul and body : get you gone !” Then I,—
 “Why, in my whole life I have never prayed !
 “Oh, if the God, that only can, would help !
 “Am I His priest, with power to cast out fiends ?
 “Let God arise, and all His enemies
 “Be scattered.*

While Browning sticks to the facts of his story, his delineations are striking, life-like, and artistic. At the outset he discards all mystery with regard to the sequel, and makes his public as wise as himself. If the reader, therefore, is carried through the first two volumes with a desire to learn more, the interest solely arises from the poet’s graphic manner of narrating the leading incidents of the story. But when he gets to the advocates’ speeches in the third volume, or to anything like general theorizing, the reader is drenched with commonplace

* “Giuseppe Caponsacchi,” vol. ii., p. 216.

tirades in lop-sided metre, and closes the book through very weariness of the flesh. Let him fancy, if he can, the effect in the latter half of a story of two hundred of such doggerel lines as the following :—

A gentlewoman lived in Smyrna once
Virum et filium ex eo conceptum, who
 Both husband and her son begot by him,
 Killed, *interfecerat, ex quo*, because
Vir filium suum perdiderat, her spouse
 Had been beforehand with her, killed her son,
Matrimonii primi, of a previous bed.
Deinde accusata, then accused,
Apud Dolabellam, before him that sat,
Proconsul, nec duabus cædibus
Contaminatam liberare, nor
 To liberate a woman doubly-dyed
 With murder, *voluit*, made he up his mind,
Nec condemnare, nor to doom to death,
Iusto dolore impulsam, one impelled
 By just grief, *sed remisit*, but sent her up
Ad Areopagum, to the Hill of Mars.*

The only excuse that can be assigned for this sort of thing is that the poet, in accordance with his plan of treatment, was bound to represent the case in every phase through which it passed. But it may easily be denied that Roman advocates, stupid though they be, could treat the case as if they were reading for the Court the prose translation of an Eton Latin grammar. Besides, the poet has nothing to do with any feature of a story, except such as will both amuse and instruct his readers. He is bound to handle his materials so as to insure both. But in the greater portion of the latter half of the work, Browning appears bent upon doing neither. Persons jealous of the honour of English literature would, doubtless, urge him to discard most of the two last volumes as an excrescence, which serves no purpose except to disfigure what might otherwise be a fine per-

* "Dominus Hyacinthus," vol. iii., p. 133.

formance. It is the duty of the critic to appeal to him to do so, not only that so short-lived an insect as man may be benefited by his labours, but for the credit of his own reputation.

The qualities in which Mr. Browning excels are not those which belong to the highest rank of poetry. He is deficient in ideality, in lyrical sweetness and sublimity, in portraying the calmer passions, in the embodiment of quiet sensibility, and in that innate perception of material loveliness, which lifts the soul to the threshold of heaven, only to send it back to earth grasping the emptiness of despair. Of architectonic skill in constructing or unfolding a story, he knows nothing. If he moves the passions, it is by the erratic representation of visual fact. He knows the world thoroughly, and can reveal the secret springs of character so far as they are emblazoned in outside results, with the hand of a master. Give him also the general features of a story, and he will supply the minor incidents so skilfully that the whole will start into life again with the appearance of reality. But Browning seldom gets beyond the story itself. The phenomena of his subject, both material and spiritual, are depicted very vividly, but these are rarely used as the steps of ascent to a higher order of things. He seldom attempts to generalize, because he has no philosophy, and as little theoretic religion. Hence, he never lifts his readers from the actual into the ideal, and if he resuscitates the past, it is only with the feelings of the present.

Browning's great forte is in the representation of selfish natures, in the embodiment of those lurking qualities, which, while hidden from the eye of the ordinary observer, constitute the main-spring of the man. But strange to say, this excellence is not displayed in his dramas where there was a peculiar field for its exercise, being completely overridden by his singular habit of unfolding a story upon some preconceived theory, only intelligible to himself. But in the "*Ring and the Book*," and in his "*Men and Women*," it appears to conspicuous advantage. Hence, though Browning cannot be said to

have enriched the life-blood of his age with any new thoughts, he has carved out for himself a particular department of his art, in which he may be said not so much to have surpassed his contemporaries as to have only thoroughly explored himself. He has unravelled the skein of complex motives. He has exhibited under a glass case the counteracting checks of feeling, volition, and intellect at work in the actions of great characters. He has displayed a wide sympathy with opposite poles of religious thought. He has dominated language by ideas, and realized the maximum amount of energy in the least compass of expression. It is owing to the strength derived from these various sources, that his descriptions, realistic though they be, and his characters, individual as they are, fully entitle Mr. Browning to a respectable place among the third-class poets of our literature.

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